

The Stars Above Us

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The Stars Above Us

by [embersofapril](#)

Summary

He remains silent at first, clearly unsure of what to say next. The temperature feels hot, he thinks, especially for the dungeon's standards. He feels as if he can see the air particles between them, perhaps even count how many separate them from one another.

It feels odd for him to be alone with Granger in the potions lab after all this time.

He catches the faint scent of strawberries and honey, reminding him to order the ingredients for his lesson on Amortentia for his NEWT classes next week.

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A slow-burn, flashback-filled dramione fanfiction with a side of wolfstar.

Notes

I am forever indebted to my lovely beta team whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished. This fic would not be what it is today without their ever-present support. They are all incredibly talented writers and I 100% recommend reading their work(s) if you haven't already!

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This fic is now complete as of May 21st, 2023.

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- Translation into Русский available: [Звёзды над нами | The Stars Above Us](#) by [Eliza_fister](#), [Sabrina_de_Villier](#), [thatponytailgirl](#)
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The Muggleborn Integration Program

embersofapril

The Stars Above Us



elivrayn



At the end of a rather desolate street in Herefordshire, a woman appears seemingly out of nowhere. She is smartly dressed, almost impeccably so, appearing to be perhaps a solicitor of some kind.

She smooths her skirt and straightens her posture before taking off at a brisk pace towards the red-brick house with the number 20 to the left of the door.

She stands there for a minute, though she doesn't seem to be lost or confused. She taps a wooden stick on her wrist and mutters an indecipherable phrase under her breath, the number 8:59 appearing in front of her.

The average passerby may have stopped to gawk at such a sight, or even rub their eyes and shake their head in disbelief. But there were no people about on this bright summer morning, for it is a Saturday, and the inhabitants of this street do rather enjoy having a lay-in on the weekends.

The woman places a delicate knock on the doorway the minute the numbers in front of her turn to 9:00. The paint on the door in front of her is starting to peel away, the weathered wood underneath visible to those who choose to look closely.

The woman hears footsteps approaching the door from the other side and takes another moment to smooth out her clothing, though there were no wrinkles to begin with.

"Hello?" answers a portly man at the door, "how can I help you?" he asks, as if remembering his manners. His hair is dishevelled, and the woman suddenly feels rather guilty for interrupting his morning. But she quickly swats this feeling away, reminding herself that she is, after all, a very busy woman.

"Hello," the woman smiles. "I'm Professor Granger, I was wondering if I might speak with you and your wife about your daughter Elizabeth for a moment."

The man furrows his brow, evidently shocked by many things all at once. Perhaps it is Professor Granger's early arrival or the fact that she knows his daughter's name. But no matter, he opens the door a little wider and beckons her inside, hollering for his wife in the process.

The house is a cosy one. One that is evidently *lived in*, arts and crafts lining the walls, shoes tossed carelessly at the door. The Professor smiles, for this is her favourite kind of home.

The smell of sausages greets her nose as she follows the man down a hallway, entering a small kitchen at the back of the home. The windows are open, allowing for the warm summer air to float through the space.

“Hello, Mrs. Beverly,” the Professor smiles. The woman smiles back, though wearily, the tips of her smile not reaching as far as they would if she was genuinely happy to see the Professor.

“Hello Ms...” she trails off, waiting for the strange woman to introduce herself.

“Professor Granger,” she adds, extending her hand towards the woman. The woman accepts, confusion still riddled across her face. Though, interestingly, the title *Professor* seems to inspire some confidence.

“Is Elizabeth here?” the Professor asks as she takes a seat at the kitchen table. She had not been invited to sit but decided that the lack of invitation was most likely due to Mrs. Beverly’s confusion, rather than a lack of manners.

“She’s down at the stream, just behind the garden,” Mrs. Beverly explains, glancing towards the back of the house. “Would you like me to fetch her?” she inquires.

“Not at the moment. I would like to speak with you and your husband first if that’s alright,” the Professor explains.

The couple comes to join her at the table, sharing a brief glance of worry with one another. The professor smiles inwardly, memories of her own parents floating through her mind.

“Now I’m sure my presence is quite a shock, but you need not worry,” the Professor begins. “Has Elizabeth ever been able to do things you consider to be... out of the ordinary?” she asks with a smile.

The Professor knows the couple will reply in one of two ways. The first, and the rather preferable way, is that they tell the truth, deciding that this strange lady could be the answer to the questions they’ve been having ever since their daughter first showed signs of accidental magic. The second, and unfortunately the much more common option, is that they deny the accusations, thinking the Professor to be something of a lunatic.

The Professor holds her breath for a moment, attempting to decipher what their response will be. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,” Mrs. Beverly begins, looking positively aghast at such a suggestion. Her husband places his hand over hers on the table, sending her a glance of what the Professor can only assume to be reassurance.

“When Elizabeth was six-years-old,” he begins, “she was climbing the tree just there,” he points to the tree visible through the open window. “She slipped and fell, and I rushed towards her, hoping to catch her,” he continues. “But then, it was as if her fall was slowed as if she was floating,” he adds, a slight grin on his face, surely due to how silly he feels for admitting such a thing. But Mr. Beverly, for whatever reason, feels as if he can trust the strange lady with such a tale.

The Professor keeps her reaction on the border of neutral and positive the entire time. After many visits over the past few years, she has this process down to a perfect science. If she reacts at all surprised by the tale, the parents typically withdraw, not wanting to be considered nutters or what have you. If her reaction is overly positive, however, the parents tend to think of *her* as a nutter.

“And have there been any other occurrences such as this?” Professor Granger prods, looking directly at Mrs. Beverly. The woman opens her mouth to speak but quickly snaps it shut. The Professor remains patient, allowing the mother to open up in her own time.

“Well,” she begins, fidgeting slightly with her apron. “Just last year, there was a boy who was picking on her at school,” she continues, looking toward her husband. “Elizabeth was somehow able to leave the school and walk over a mile home by herself, undetected.”

The Professor nods. “I had a similar experience when I was Elizabeth’s age,” she explains. She allows the parents to come to terms with what she has just said before continuing.

“I am actually visiting today to offer your daughter a place at the school at which I am a Professor,” she continues. “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry,” she adds with a kind smile. She pushes a small envelope towards the parents, the letter addressed to Elizabeth Beverly.

They open the letter together in silence, skimming through the information. The mother looks up with a concerned expression on her face, staring at the Professor as if seeing her for the first time.

But now is Professor Granger’s favourite part of the visit. She removes her wooden stick once more and points it at the kettle, it suddenly reaching a boil. Next, she summons three mugs, adds the teabags and pours the hot water all without laying a finger on the objects.

The father grins immediately, a look of bewilderment on his face, the mother slightly less shocked than her husband.

The Professor spends the next half hour explaining the basics of the wizarding world, being sure to include that she was also not born to a wizarding family. She watches the mother start to relax as time goes by. This makes the Professor happy because she hasn’t even gotten to the best part, the part she is the proudest of.

Professor Granger, motivated by her own time at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, created a program for other witches and wizards such as herself. She did not want these new students to feel as lost as she had, as confused and *othered*. She wanted nothing more than for every single student who passes through Hogwarts’ doors to feel welcome and at home.

The Muggleborn Integration Program was implemented the year that Professor Granger was hired at the school after the completion of her Double Mastery in Charms. In fact, she had made the program a condition of the acceptance of her role. Headmistress McGonagall had supported the initiative wholeheartedly, mostly because she was struggling to keep up with her visits to all the muggleborn students that seemed to be born at a rate much higher than ever seen before.

Professor Granger has a theory as to why this might be, something she had begun to refer to as Magical Self-Replenishment. She knows that magic is far more than what we can see, more than even witches and wizards will ever be able to comprehend. She knows that magic is around us, perhaps stitched into the very fabric of our lives.

It is for this reason that the Professor believes magic is able to detect when the number of magic users is dwindling—an unfortunate repercussion of the war. It seems that magic was determined to repopulate its users, placing the gift of being able to manipulate it in the homes of more muggles than ever before. The Professor has seen the numbers, and they are shocking. By her calculation, there will be more muggleborn witches and wizards in the world than those born to magical families by 2023, should current trends progress.

But the Professor has never been someone to look at the facts and accept them as such. No, she is someone who wants to do something about it.

The Muggleborn Integration Program was created for this reason. From the end of June to mid-July, the Professor travels across the United Kingdom, visiting 2-3 muggle families each week. The encounters range from one brief hour to many consecutive hours, depending on the acceptance of the parents. The visit always follows the same structure, the Professor making her way through the flowchart in her mind.

If one or both of the parents seem to be reluctant to believe the words she is speaking (and rightfully so, she can remember her own shock all those years ago), she will carefully pull her wand out of her pocket, and perform a simple task, nothing too daunting. Most of the time, much like today, she will prepare tea.

The Professor then explains the Muggleborn Integration Program at length. She used to come prepared with PowerPoint slides that she would cast in the air next to her, but her friend Harry assured her that this was over the top and unnecessary.

The program is simple, in her humble opinion. All the first-year muggleborn students are invited to arrive a week prior to September 1st. A member of the staff escorts each family through the floo to Hogsmeade. At first, there had been some reluctance to allow the Muggle parents onto the premises, but the Professor had been adamant that it was necessary.

She argued that the parents needed to understand the world that their child was entering, not only so that they could be reassured that they would be safe, but also because it's crucial for them to understand their child.

Far too often are muggleborn wizards and witches forced to choose between their two worlds, and the Professor didn't want this to be the case any longer.

An agreement had been reached between her, The Wizengamot, and the Hogwarts Board of Directors: the parents would be allowed on the premises for three days *only* and had to sign a non-disclosure agreement of sorts, one that was charmed so that they could not breach The Statute of Secrecy. The parents would stay at the Hotel in Hogsmeade, a short walk away from the castle.

The muggleborn students stayed in the castle, the first week of their stay almost like a summer camp, filled with excitement. But, these students are not sorted until September 1st. Instead, they stay in a general common room of sorts, each house's colours proudly on display.

The Professor had insisted on this, mostly because she remembers how lonely it had felt her first few days at Hogwarts when everyone else already seemed to know one another. No, the Professor was determined to assure that all the muggleborn students have the opportunity to make friends before they were split into their respective houses. It is also a fantastic way to promote inter-house unity, something that she had included in her lengthy, 300-page proposal.

The week leading up to September 1st is filled to the brim with a variety of activities and workshops. For some, such as the workshops on wizarding culture, the students and parents are both welcome to attend. Headmistress McGonagall explains The Statute of Secrecy, the structure of the student's studies for the next 7 years, and even invites some of the more friendly ghosts to introduce themselves.

For some other workshops, such as the history of wizarding kind, the students are invited to explore the grounds with Professor Longbottom who is always far too eager to urge the Giant Squid to reveal itself to the eleven-year-olds.

While the students explore, the parents are given a crash course of sorts on the more complex aspects of their history, including, of course, the last Wizarding War. This lesson, delivered by Professor Granger herself, is one of utmost importance, for she believes that it is crucial for the parents to know and understand the world that their children are entering.

Each workshop curriculum was meticulously designed by Professor Granger who used her own experiences as a place to start but continuously modifies and improves them based on the feedback they receive. She sends a modified version to the Ministry of Magic and the board of directors each year, though she doubts that they read it.

The third and final day of the parents' visit involves a trip into Diagon Alley to fetch the students' supplies. The staff of Hogwarts happily take on a few families to show around, visiting Flourish and Blotts, Madam Malkins, and Ollivanders.

There is, of course, a scholarship fund in place for families who cannot afford such things, generously funded by various supporters, and one anonymous donor in particular who donated over half the funds.

At the end of the parents' three-day stay, they are offered some reading materials, free of charge. The collection of books offers further information on the Wizarding World, and Hogwarts in particular, should they like to know more. Some parents happily accept, evidently eager to read through the pages. Others accept with a kind smile, though Professor Granger can tell that the books will most likely sit untouched on their shelves. The last group of parents, and consequently Professor Granger's least favourites, are those who refuse the books outright.

Actually, her least favourites are those who do not attend at all, quite happy to send their child off to a strange place without a care in the world. Though, she supposes that there will always be people like those who raised her dear friend Harry.

When Elizabeth comes barreling into the kitchen, covered head to toe in dirt, the Professor can't help but grin. "Hello Elizabeth," she adds, her voice transforming into a pitch slightly higher than usual.

"Hullo," the child replies, a devilish sort of look in her eyes.

"Would you like to be cleaned up?" the Professor asks.

"Okay," the child replies simply. The Professor loves the simplicity of children, the way they don't overthink things such as a strange person offering such a thing.

With the wave of her wand, the dirt disappears, Elizabeth's hair pulling into a plait at the same time.

Elizabeth grins, her mother uttering something under her breath about wishing that she was able to do such a thing, the ability likely saving her countless hours of housework.

After the Professor gives a rather simplified version of Hogwarts to Elizabeth, she readily accepts before quickly running back out into the garden. Not a moment later she returns, a stick in hand.

"Can you show me how to do that?" she asks, holding the stick out towards Hermione.

“I will, very soon Elizabeth,” she assures her. She doesn’t have the heart to tell her that the object she is holding is nothing but an ordinary piece of wood, for the Professor is a firm believer that half the fun of learning about magic is the ability to start to see it everywhere.

After setting up the Beverly’s floo, and arranging for their appointment in two weeks' time, the Professor steps out onto the street once more. She casts the same spell as before, and at the appearance of the numbers, disappears quickly from where she had stood as if she had never been there at all.

Parchment, Grass, and Peppermint

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who is following along with this story! It is one that I have been dreaming of for months, so I am so glad that people are enjoying it so far! Every kudos, subscription and comment means the world to me. I will be posting chapter updates and whatnot on my TikTok, Instagram & Twitter @embersofapril.

For translations and further information, please see the notes at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Professor Granger arrives in Hogsmeade a few days later, the castle well within sight, she quickly transforms her clothing into something far more proper for wizarding society. Her robes are a midnight shade of blue, though they are more so what people would consider modest, rather than fashionable.

“Hermione!” the Professor hears from behind her.

“Neville!” she exclaims with a wave.

“I’m heading back to the castle. Are you as well?” he asks with a grin. His hands are full, at least eight books stacked one on top of the other. At the very top, on the brink of falling, is a peculiar plant, one that appears to be a rather lopsided cactus.

“Yes, I’ll walk with you,” she replies, removing the sad-looking plant from his stack before it tumbles to its demise.

“Thanks,” he smiles. “How was your visit today?” he inquires. Hermione enjoys Neville’s company, partially due to the fact that when he asks a question, you can tell he genuinely cares about hearing your response.

“It went well,” she begins, “though I can already tell that the child, Robbie, may become a bit of a handful.” She laughs, remembering how his response to finding out that he is a wizard was to do a cartwheel, resulting in a broken lamp.

However, it is worth noting that she did feel sorrowful, though only ever so slightly after the visit. Robbie is the youngest of five children, meaning that he is certainly the only wizard in the family. His siblings had been all too eager to listen in, words of wondering when their letter would come reaching Hermione’s ears.

Upon hearing their eagerness, Hermione secretly grew glad that she has no siblings, for she knew that she would have felt an immense amount of guilt about leaving them behind when her letter had arrived.

Robbie was to become a scholarship student, though this information is strictly confidential, his family unable to purchase his supplies. When she had first told him of the school, they had grown

worried, as well as slightly embarrassed to admit that they would likely not be able to afford the cost. Hermione had assured them they need not worry.

Professor Granger was exceedingly proud of the scholarship initiative, though she detested having to attend the Gala each year in honour of the supporters. She was of the belief that those who donate their galleons but require such extravagant recognition are not donating for the right reasons at all. Though, she supposes it's well worth the trouble. Who is she to turn down thousands of galleons?

In her opinion, people should donate because they care about the cause, not because they want their family's name printed on a plaque. She often wonders who the anonymous donor is, the one who had donated over half of the funds. She would like to thank them, even more so because they sent their galleons with no recognition required.

She pictures them to be a wise old woman, perhaps a muggleborn like herself with no descendants to speak of. In Hermione's mind, the donor is a scholar who invented a potion in her youth, now eager to disperse her galleons as she ages.

"How many muggleborn students are starting this year?" asks Neville, dragging Hermione out of her train of thought.

"Twelve," she smiles.

"Wow, that's what, a third of the students in their year?" he inquires.

"Yes, and the numbers will only continue to grow in the coming years," she adds. Hermione knows Neville is asking partially because he knows how much she enjoys discussing the topic. That's another reason she enjoys Neville's company. He remembers what topics people are passionate about and is sure to ask them about them.

"That reminds me, I will be assigning the Alcott Family to you when they arrive. The mother had a beautiful garden," she says with a grin, Neville lighting up at the idea.

Later that day, as Hermione makes her way down the corridor toward the staff room, her head snaps up rather suddenly. Looking around, she attempts to decipher what on earth could have caused her to have such a reaction. There is nothing out of the ordinary, so she continues on her way. However, as she approaches the large wooden door, a familiar scent washes over her. She scrunches up her nose ever so slightly, the peculiar combination of scents not making any sense at all.

At first, she can decipher the scent of parchment, like that of a well-loved book, shelved with care. She supposes that makes sense. She is in a school, after all. It's one of her favourite smells, that of the Hogwarts library, the first place in the castle that had truly felt like her home.

But the next scent she is able to elucidate is that of soil, or rather the grass, after it rains. The earthy smell of a field coated in morning dew. Perhaps Madam Hooch had just returned from the quidditch pitch. Hermione has never cared much for quidditch, and only ever attended games at the request of her friends.

But the third scent is the one that befuddles her the most of all: spearmint. A scent that she is all too familiar with, having grown up the child of two dentists, but this time, it seems different. It is

sweeter, not as sharp as the spearmint of toothpaste. Perhaps it is peppermint, rather than spearmint. The peppermint of yule, and Christmas mornings spent beneath the Douglas fir in her parents' home.

Shaking her head, she continues into the room as she allows herself to ponder if perhaps she is falling ill. Surely it isn't a good thing to be smelling such a random assortment of things.

Her thoughts are hardly given a moment to fester, as the answer to her wondering presents itself in the form of an acquaintance, one she had not seen for many years.

At the staff table sits a man with hair as white as the snow on a crisp January morning, a look of smugness etched into his features. His relaxed posture suggests he is comfortable, yet also simultaneously feels the need to *appear* self-assured. He is speaking animatedly with the Headmistress as she walks towards her seat.

She remains silent as she attempts to get comfortable in her chair, suddenly increasingly aware of both the air around her and the state of her appearance. Hermione is not one to think of such things, preferring to spend her mental energy on other pursuits rather than her looks. But the presence of this old acquaintance, perhaps he could even be considered an old friend, seems to be rewiring her brain.

As the meeting commences, Hermione finds her mind wandering once more, this time through the halls of Oxford where she had completed her first mastery in alchemy. This was, after all, the last time she has seen this acquaintance of hers.

"Professor Granger?" she hears, alerting her to the present moment once more.

"I trust that everything is well and in order for the arrival of the muggleborn students in two weeks' time?" the headmistress asks in her thick Scottish accent.

"Of course," Hermione replies, standing to hand out the packages that she had prepared for the members of staff. Each contains information regarding the families that they would be responsible for. The folders also include a few short sentences regarding her experience with the family, highlighting their reluctance or acceptance of their child's reality. She had completed the notes from today on her walk to the meeting, transferring the thoughts from her brain onto the paper with a spell of her own creation.

She was rather proud of the folders, believing that she had paired up each family perfectly with a member of staff. However, after Professor Slughorn's long-awaited retirement the year prior, she hadn't known who would fill the position of Potions Master this year. As a result, she had given this Professor a family that she couldn't quite match to anyone else. As she catches the eye of her acquaintance, she starts to worry that this might not have been such a good idea.

There isn't anything terribly wrong with him, she knows that. However, he doesn't necessarily evoke the warm and welcoming energy that she typically hopes for. She knows that he no longer holds the ideals which he had preached in his youth, but she still can't help but cringe at the idea of him being in charge of helping with the integration of a muggleborn student.

She decides to keep a close eye on him throughout the process.

"I'd like to welcome Professor Malfoy, who will be joining us as Potions Master this year," continues the Headmistress. "Luckily, Mr. Malfoy, you already know a few members of our staff,"

she smiles.

This is true. Next to Mr. Malfoy is the divination professor, someone who looks as if she could be his twin, possibly in another life. Luna's equally white hair frames her face, a dreamy sort of look in her eyes.

Next to her is Professor Longbottom, in charge of all things Herbology, with a spot of dirt on his nose.

Another notable figure includes a man in a grey suit, a large scar travelling across his face, Remus Lupin, the Professor of Defence Against The Dark Arts.

A variety of witches and wizards teach the other subjects, coming to Hogwarts from all four corners of the world. Professor Sakurai of Mahoutokoro School of Magic in Japan, for example, had joined the staff as the Professor of Arithmancy the same year as Hermione.

Ancient Runes is now taught by the eccentric Helena Costa from Castelobruzo in Brazil. She is one of Hermione's favourite coworkers, though she would never admit to such a thing, not wanting to offend the others.

It had been a goal of the Headmistress after the war, to diversify their teaching staff, opening up teaching positions to graduates from around the world, rather than just alumni of their own. Hermione had agreed with this decision completely.

"Now, we have some important details to discuss," continues the Headmistress. "As you all know, we will be hosting The International Confederation of Wizards Championship this year, the first of its kind."

Hermione groans inwardly, a firm believer that any championship reminiscent of the Triwizard Tournament is a misuse of funds and a rather dangerous one at that. However, she couldn't help but be delighted at the prospect of meeting witches and wizards from around the world, as she found the idea highly fascinating.

The ICWC involves all seven wizarding schools, rather than the sole three that had partaken in the Triwizard tournament. This means that there would be seven champions this year, one from each school. Professor Sakurai was anxiously awaiting the arrival of his younger sister from Mahoutokoro, and Helena simply looking forward to having people to converse with in her native language from Castelobruzo. Seventh-year students would also be arriving from Beauxbatons, Durmstrang, Ilvermorny, Uagadou and Koldovstoretz.

Hermione thanked Merlin for the fact that only seventeen-year-olds were being permitted to participate, wanting anything but a repeat of her friend Harry's entry into the tournament at the ripe age of fourteen.

The headmistress gave each of the Professors with any kind of connection to one of the visiting schools the responsibility of acting as a liaison of sorts. This means, unfortunately, that Hermione would be acting as a liaison with Ilvermorny and possibly one of her least favourite people on the planet, perhaps only second to Rita Skeeter herself, Jocelyne Williams.

During her second Mastery, this one in charms, Jocelyne had become somewhat of an arch-nemesis. In fact, Hermione would go so far as to say that Jocelyne reminded her of a pink, toad-like professor that she once was unfortunate enough to have as an instructor.

But Hermione does what she does best: smiles and accepts the role without complaint. She can't help but overhear, however, that Malfoy will be acting as a liaison with Beauxbatons, simply because of his ability to speak french.

“Je serais honoré,” he replies. Hermione has to stop herself from rolling her eyes but also happens to notice a shiver weaving its way down her spine as she hears him speak. She wonders if perhaps there is a draft in the room.

As the meeting comes to a close, Hermione makes a quick getaway towards the door, hoping to avoid having to converse with Malfoy at all costs. As she emerges into the hall, she releases a quick breath and fans her face ever so slightly, wondering why they keep the castle at such a temperature in the middle of the summer months.

“Hermione!” she hears to her left, her head quickly snapping up to see who the voice was coming from. She releases the tension that had arisen in her shoulders as she sees the familiar face of Professor Lupin.

“Would you like to join us for dinner tonight?” he asks. “Sirius hoped that you would,” he adds.

She accepts the offer without hesitation, their small cottage in Hogsmeade one of her favourite places in the world.

After a short walk into the village, Professor Lupin and Hermione arrive at the cottage. It's a small, cosy sort of home with a gabled roof and a bright red door, a motorbike parked next to the entrance. Wizarding houses rarely have a place to park a vehicle, mostly because a diminutive percentage of wizarding folks find a need for such a thing.

The word “Mione!” emerges from the house, the door swinging open with a clatter as Cassandra Lupin-Black, Cassie for short, runs out to greet her godmother. Cassie is one of Hermione's favourite people, and no, it's not just because she's her goddaughter.

Cassie was adopted a few short months after the war, three days after Remus and Sirius's wedding. She had been eight years old at the time, an orphan of the war. Interestingly, she had been a daughter of death eaters, but Remus and Sirius did not intend to judge a small child on the choices of her parents. Sirius is, after all, a product of the same environment.

Entering her seventh year at Hogwarts, Hermione still couldn't believe just how much Cassie had changed and evolved over the years. She'd watched her grow up, after all, often acting as what Sirius refers to as a “feminine energy” in her life. Secretly, Hermione believes that Sirius brought enough of this energy to the table, but would, of course, never admit to this fact unless under the influence of a few too many glasses of firewhiskey.

“Hello love,” Hermione grins, pulling Cassie into a tight hug. “Are you excited for this year?” she asks carefully. Hermione and Remus both know that Cassie fully intends on entering the ICWC this year, much to her fathers' displeasure.

“Fuck yeah,” she exclaims. “There's going to be a whole pool of new people from around the world at my disposal,” she whispers to Hermione, wiggling her eyebrows.

“And your studies to focus on!” adds Lupin, overhearing his daughter's comment with his lupine hearing.

“Yes of course father dearest,” she teases, placing a delicate kiss on his cheek. Hermione giggles to herself, all too aware of just how tightly wound both Sirius and Remus are around their daughter's finger.

The three of them head inside, the warm aromas of Sirius's cooking wafting throughout the space. In the past few years, Sirius had taken up cooking as somewhat of a hobby, needing something to do to keep himself busy while Remus is teaching and his daughter is at school.

The location of their home is no coincidence. Sirius wanted nothing more than to be close enough to his husband and daughter so they could visit whenever they pleased. . But, over time the cottage had morphed into something of a home for all the professors of Hogwarts. Though all the professors have their own living quarters, they will never be quite as *home-like* as one might hope.

Neville, in particular, seemed to enjoy Sirius's company and had helped him start to grow his own herbs to be used in his cooking. Luna visits once a month before the full moon to rid the cottage of nargles. The cottage's doors are always open, and those who choose to visit always leave with a full belly.

Hermione visits rather frequently as well, joining them for dinner at least once a week. Cassie will often accompany her during the school year, always acting as if it's a bother to visit her fathers, though it's secretly her favourite part of the week.

Cassie is very aware of the fact, perhaps alarmingly so, that her life could have ended up far different than it had if her fathers hadn't adopted her. She can't remember much of her life before, and for that, she is very thankful. In fact, she hasn't a clue who her birth parents were. Hermione had told her that there are ways of discovering their identities, but Cassie prefers the bliss of ignorance. She's quite content with her life, and would rather not dwell in the darkness of her past.

As the night wears on, and the bottles of elf wine on the table empty, Cassie can't help but allow her mind to wander. She knows this year will likely be her best year at Hogwarts yet, despite her NEWTs looming in the distance. She's eager most of all for the competition coming to their doorstep, the overwhelming need to prove herself taking precedence over everything else.



[The Lupin-Black Family \(art by guine_evere\)](#)



art by [shekarti](#)

Chapter End Notes

“Je serais honoré,” = it would be my honour

Schools attending The International Confederation of Wizards Championship

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry (Scotland)

Beauxbatons Academy of Magic (France)

Castelobruxo (Brazil)

Durmstrang Institute (Northern Europe)

Ilvermony (Eastern North America)

Mahoutokoro School of Magic (Japan)

Ugandou School of Magic (Uganda)

Koldovstoretz (Russia)

Evidently, there are some very major changes to canon which I noted in the tags. Remus and Sirius obviously never died, and for the sake of argument, we'll say that Remus never married Tonks as well. This means that, unfortunately, Teddy Lupin will not be making any appearances.

There are some other crucial changes, but I will discuss them as they reveal themselves!

Potions & Apple Pie

Chapter Notes

Thank you again to everyone who is following along! I had a lot of fun writing this chapter, so I hope you enjoy it as much as I do. This chapter offers some further insight regarding our potions master.

Enjoy! :)

Even considering its location in the highlands of Scotland, hidden from any muggles who may stumble upon it, Hogwarts experienced particularly rainy weather on the morning of August 25th. But the rain rhythmically beating against the window in Professor Granger's office does nothing to dampen her spirits. In fact, one might say that it is having the opposite effect.

Hermione has always been rather partial to rainy days, especially those spent within the castle's walls. She has never expressed such a thing to anyone, for no one has ever thought to ask. But, she supposes she enjoys rainy days because, in her youth, it gave her an excuse as to why she wasn't outside on the grounds with her peers.

Now, it isn't that Hermione dislikes the outdoors, for this is simply not true. No, she merely prefers the indoors, and the library in particular. Far too often she would hear the pleading of her friends, begging her to join them outside, forcing her to weigh her options.

The decision-making process involved in such an occurrence became like second nature to Hermione by the end of her studies. If she said yes, her friends would smile and beckon her to follow them. She would toss her books, parchment and quills into her bag, and reluctantly leave her sanctuary in the shelves.

If she expressed any reluctance whatsoever, her friends would whine and complain, expressing that she *never* wanted to do anything fun. Hermione always found this odd, mostly because her definition of fun was rather different from that of her peers. Sometimes, she would give in and follow them, simply because she didn't want to deal with their remarks.

Other times, she would stand her ground, usually by rambling on about all the assignments she had to work on. This would usually do the trick, her peers leaving with haste, not wanting to be pulled into an impromptu study session. Little did they know, Hermione had completed those assignments long before her visit to the library.

However, on rainy days, none of her peers would come searching for Hermione, leaving her with endless hours of uninterrupted time spent amongst the shelves. Unfortunately, or perhaps, depending on who you ask, *fortunately*, Hermione much preferred the company of books to that of her peers. As she's gotten older, however, she's realised that this statement may not be as true as she once thought it to be. Hermione simply struggled to interact with her peers, for they did not have much in common.

So, she would sit at her favourite table, the one tucked in the very back corner of the Alchemy section. It was her favourite table for many reasons. For one, very few students at Hogwarts would venture into this area of the library, meaning that she didn't have to hear the pointless ramblings of her fellow students until she emerged. But also, and perhaps even more importantly, this table was placed directly next to a window.

Hermione would sit and watch the seasons change from this very table. The leaves would turn from Slytherin green to hues of brown and orange, eventually falling to the ground. The snow was next to arrive, snowflakes floating by the window, the grounds becoming completely coated in a thin layer of white. Footsteps in the snow would then melt, the green shades of spring emerging once more.

Hermione often wondered if any of her peers noticed such things. Any time she attempted to discuss these sorts of things with her friends, they would look at her with confused expressions before asking her to *get to the point*. Eventually, she stopped expressing such thoughts to anyone because the point was exactly what she had expressed.

But alas, Hermione is excited for this rainy day in particular, because today is the day that the muggleborn first years are coming to Hogwarts.

Everything is perfectly in order, as it usually is when Professor Granger is in charge. She checks her appearance briefly in the small mirror by the door before heading out into the hall. She smiles as she winds her way through the corridors with a slight spring in her step, the occasional portrait offering a greeting as she passes.

A few floors below, the Potions Master can be found. He is perhaps the perfect contradiction to Professor Granger upstairs, but not for the reason one may think. His steps are slow, and he drags his feet as he makes his way through the dungeons as if he does not want to arrive at his destination at all.

He adjusts an aspect of his appearance every few feet. At first, he polishes his black-rimmed glasses before placing them back on the sharp slant of his nose. Then, he adjusts his robes, though one may note that there was nothing wrong with them in the first place. He fiddles with the ring on his finger, a golden letter M being pushed beneath his thumb.

Professor Malfoy is not typically one to fidget, as he had been explicitly raised not to do such a thing. But today seems to be an exception, for reasons that he does not wish to discuss. As he makes his way up the stairs at a leisurely pace, he notices that all the other members of staff have already gathered. He curses under his breath at his tardiness, frustrated with himself for allowing something as silly as *nerves* to disrupt his perfect timing.

Professor Granger is reviewing the day's procedures once more, causing a small smile to emerge on his face. It is no smile with teeth, but it is undoubtedly there. He ponders why she feels the need to review things so many times, *beating a dead horse*, as the muggles say. He's always wondered why they say such a thing.

"Ah, Malfoy, there you are," she says. Her tone of voice causes him to check his watch, worrying that he is perhaps much later than he had realised, but he is only fifteen seconds late.

"Yes, here I am," he drawls. "And don't worry, I remember that I will be with the Murphy family today," he begins, making direct eye contact with her. "Their daughter's name is Beatrice, Bea for

short. She was born on October 17th, 1995 in Sligo, Ireland. Her parents' names are Mary and Michael Murphy. Her father works in a factory, and her mother is a house cleaner.” He smirks ever so slightly, awaiting her response.

“Yes, thank you Malfoy,” she smiles, evidently satisfied with his preparation. He notices a small flutter in his stomach, causing him to wonder if perhaps he didn’t eat enough at breakfast.

They all start their walk into Hogsmeade, each professor casting an umbrella from their wand. Hermione takes the lead at the front of the group, chatting with Professor Longbottom about a charm she was working on that might benefit to his greenhouses.

Professor Malfoy stays at the back of the group, hands tucked neatly in his pockets, quite content to not speak with anyone at all.

“Hello Draco,” he hears suddenly, his head turning abruptly towards the source of the noise.

“Oh, hello Luna,” he replies, attempting to sound somewhat friendly.

“There’s Wrackspurts floating around your head, though I suppose you may already know that,” she says with a smile. Draco takes a moment to take in her appearance, realising that she hadn’t changed much in the past ten years at all.

“Oh?” he replies simply, not having a clue what she was on about.

“Try to think about something happy,” she urges. This causes Draco to frown, already displeased with this interaction as a whole. Suddenly he hears Hermione’s laugh from the front of the line, his head tilting upwards in an attempt to discover what she could have found so humorous.

“There you go, that’s better,” smiles Luna. Draco thinks that perhaps Luna has finally lost it completely because he hadn’t thought about anything at all.

When they arrive at the three broomsticks, each professor steps into the floo one by one, each shouting out a different destination. Hermione stands by to watch each of them pass through, nodding her head and checking off each name on her list as they go.

Draco offers her a pursed smile as he enters the floo and arrives in a small sitting room with a plush green couch tucked in the corner. He notices three very startled muggles in front of him, which confuses him slightly since they should have been expecting his arrival.

“Hello,” he says, extending his hand toward the father. “Professor Malfoy, a pleasure to meet you.”

Mr. Murphy extends his hand in return, offering a firm handshake. “Ah, Mr. Malfoy, we thought that Professor Granger would be coming to fetch us,” he explains.

“Oh, my apologies,” he replies. “Professor Granger will be meeting us there.” Beatrice looks at Draco with a confused look on her face, tilting her head ever so slightly to the left, as if trying to figure him out. Draco finds this rather unsettling.

After a brief explanation on how to use the floo, the family of three passes through, bags in tow. The Murphys all decide that The Three Broomsticks is a cheery sort of place and Mr. Murphy can’t help but wonder if they carry any good pints in such an establishment.

“This way,” urges Draco as he steps out of the floo, not wanting them to be involved in an unfortunate collision as the other families pass through. And not a moment too soon, because the Beverlys step through a few seconds after.

“Oh, Professor Malfoy, good, we can all walk together” exclaims Hermione as she steps out of the fireplace, dusting some soot off her robes.

“Beatrice, this is Elizabeth,” she smiles, introducing the two young girls. Beatrice peeks out nervously from behind her mother’s skirt before quickly hiding once more. Elizabeth looks on curiously, her brow furrowed.

“This way,” smiles Hermione, beckoning the small group to follow. Draco notices that no one questions her when she does, though he supposes that she does tend to have that effect on people.

Professor Granger transfigures a few stones into an umbrella for the guests while Elizabeth proceeds to run up ahead and loop back excitedly, her mother urging her to stay by her side. “Is it a far walk?” asks Mr. Beverly.

“No, not at all,” Hermione begins. “The castle will reveal itself to you momentarily.”

Draco realises that since they are muggles, they wouldn’t be able to see the castle off in the distance. No, it will look like a desolate hill until they pass through the wards.

A few moments later, as they pass through the gates, a collective gasp rings out. Elizabeth squeals and begins to jump around, while Beatrice stares silently at the castle with wide eyes.

“Well this is lovely,” Mrs. Murphy smiles, “I’m not sure what I was expecting, but it certainly wasn’t this.”

“Come along, we’ll meet the others in the Great Hall,” Professor Granger declares.

After a long hour of introductions and a small lunch, the tours of the castle begin. Draco can’t help but wonder why they don’t simply move about the castle as a group, though he knows that it’s based on Professor Granger’s recommendation that they complete the tours individually. On page 175 of her information package, she emphasised the importance of the staff members forming a bond of some kind with the families, something he had reluctantly agreed with when he had read it a few days prior.

And so, Draco begins a tour of the castle he had grown up in, purposely skipping over an area on the seventh floor and the astronomy tower. Beatrice remains silent the entire time, and Draco starts to feel rather like a tour guide at the muggle museums. He had visited the Louvre in Paris with his mother in the summer and had noticed the peculiar act.

“What’s that?” Beatrice asks, pointing at the cauldron in front of her. They had arrived in the dungeons, the Slytherin common room the final stop on their journey.

“A cauldron,” Draco replies simply, forgetting that this would mean nothing to the girl, for she had not grown up with such a thing.

“What does it do?” she asks.

“It’s to brew potions,” he explains, suddenly rather glad that she asked. He is the Potions Master after all.

“I make potions,” the girl smiles. This causes Draco to be confused. Surely these muggles don’t brew potions?

“Oh dear, yes you do,” laughs the mother. It is important to note that the potions that Beatrice makes are not the typical sort that can be found in the textbooks in Professor Malfoy’s class. Her potions involve mixing various household products into a mason jar and shaking it up, an activity she has been rather fond of since the age of five.

Draco, however, remains perplexed and decides to ask Granger about this later.

Dinner that evening is a very casual affair. Everyone sits at various tables throughout the Great Hall, with no seating plan whatsoever. Draco can’t help but wonder what his mother would think of such an arrangement.

He watches as Hermione floats about the room, stopping to chat with each of the families. He finds it remarkable that she possesses such eloquence, being able to remember all their names and even small facts about each of them.

For as long as he could remember, Draco had seen his mother act in a similar fashion. He’d hated being dragged to the social events at the manor, but his mother had insisted that he attend. He found them terribly boring and stuffy, but one thing he did enjoy was watching his mother interact with each of the guests. He found it intriguing, the way she seemed to know something about every person that walked through the doors. He thought it would be nice, to be able to make people feel as welcome as she did. Though he certainly did not inherit her gift for such a thing.

He decides that Granger, on the other hand, seems to possess the warmth and welcoming energy that he lacks.

“Hello again Beatrice,” Hermione smiles. “How are the potatoes?”

“Yummy,” the child replies simply, offering a thumbs up as proof.

“The food is lovely, Professor Granger,” Mrs. Murphy adds. “You must have highly competent cooking staff.”

“Oh we do indeed.” She grins. “Would you like to meet them?”

The muggles find this to be a rather odd suggestion, but over the course of the day have stopped questioning the things around them, for everything is odd to them.

“We’d love to,” Mrs. Murphy smiles.

“Gimpy!” Hermione sings, a small house elf suddenly appearing.

Mr. Murphy’s fork falls to his plate with a clatter, his eyes wide with shock.

Beatrice launches into a fit of giggles, a grin spreading across her face.

“Gimpy, this is the Murphy family,” Hermione begins. “They were just complimenting your potatoes.”

“Oh thank yous, Sir and Madam, yous is ever so kind to Gimpy.” The elf blushes, her feet turning inwards toward one another as she fiddles with her apron.

“Can Gimpy be getting anythings for the young miss?” she asks, looking towards Beatrice expectantly.

“Do you have apple pie?” Beatrice asks with a grin.

“Bea, you can’t just ask the poor chef to make you a pie,” starts Mrs. Murphy.

“Comings right up young miss!” exclaims Gimpy before disappearing with a snap.

Hermione chuckles. “They’re paid very well don’t worry,” she assures the family.

Not a moment later, Gimpy returns with a piece of the pie in hand, placing it directly in front of Beatrice with a shy smile.

“Thank you Gimpy,” she smiles, digging into the slice immediately. Her parents look rather shocked at the whole ordeal, and Draco has to remind himself that they would have never experienced such a thing before.

Hermione wishes them well before carrying on to the next table. “Apple pie is my favourite too,” Draco whispers to Beatrice, earning a small grin in return. She pushes her plate towards him, a few bites left, a silent offering.

He takes a piece onto his fork and shovels it into his mouth, his pureblood ancestors likely rolling over in their graves at such a barbaric act.

“Do you think Gimpy will be my friend?” Beatrice asks nobody in particular.

“I don’t see why not,” replies Draco as he dabs his mouth with a napkin.

“Then we can have apple pie whenever we want,” she grins.

“We?” Draco asks curiously.

“Yes, you’re my friend too,” she clarifies, as if this is the most obvious fact in the world.

Draco smiles to himself, happy that someone such as Beatrice deems him worthy of sharing her pie.

Hot Cocoa & Red Slippers

Chapter Notes

Thank you all once again for following along and for your encouraging comments!

I'm not sure what kind of posting schedule I will follow, but right now I'm trying to post as frequently as possible.

I have added some extra details at the end of the chapter :)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first-year students had been tucked into their bunk beds with care, the soft glow of floating candles flickering in their eyes before they eventually fell shut. But Professor Granger remembered quite well how lonely, and even terrifying, her first night alone within the castle's walls had been.

She had found the castle to be eerily silent. There was no whir of an aircon or muffled voices from the television down the hall. No cars driving past, and certainly none of her father's snores. It was almost *too* silent, meaning that Hermione had been left alone with her thoughts, worrying about anything and everything that could possibly go wrong.

As she lay awake beneath the red and gold drapes, Hermione couldn't help but worry the hat had sorted her into the wrong house. Sure, she had wanted to be in Gryffindor, but was she really so brave if she was frightened by something as simple as the *quiet* ?

And so, a charm was cast on the ancient wooden door the moment she stepped out of the room, one that would alert her if any of the children were laying awake in silence, or perhaps even muffling their tears into their pillows.

The Professor was adamant that their first week be a positive experience, and so, any time the alarm would sound from her wand, she would quickly get out from under her covers and make her way down the hall.

The first child Saoirse was frightened by the thunderstorm outside, so Hermione cast a silencing charm around her bed. The second child missed his cat from home, so Hermione cast her otter Patronus to keep the girl company for the evening, smiling as the bright light danced around the young witch.

The third child was Beatrice, who wasn't entirely sure why she was feeling so sad. She knows that the prospect of being a witch is surely the most exciting news she will ever receive. Her bed was comfortable, and she rather enjoyed the noise of the storm outside, finding the sounds of rain and thunder to be calming, rather than frightening. So while Beatrice lay awake, staring up at the bed above her, she tried to decide what might be keeping her mind from turning off.

She often struggled with being able to stop her train of thought from wandering, speeding up and gaining momentum before flying off the tracks completely. When Beatrice starts thinking of something, it's hard for her to stop. Tonight, she can't help but wonder about the layout of the castle. She thinks that if she was to try, she may be able to find her way to the dungeons from the room she is currently in.

Beatrice notices the door open as Professor Granger enters, her feet tiptoeing across the floor. Beatrice quickly pretends to be asleep. She does not want to get in trouble on her first day. "Beatrice, are you alright?" asks the Professor.

She nods her head in reply. "My brain won't turn off," she adds.

Hermione offers her a kind smile, one that Beatrice finds to be quite lovely. "Would you like to come on a short walk with me?" the Professor inquires. "I have someone I need to visit."

Beatrice nods once more and slips out of bed and into her fluffy pink slippers. Professor Granger extends her hand towards her, which she quickly accepts.

They wind through the halls, down three sets of staircases, and eventually end up in front of a rather peculiar painting of a bowl of fruit. Professor Granger reaches toward the painting and tickles the pear, something that Beatrice finds quite comical. She stares in shock as the pear giggles before turning into a doorknob before her very eyes.

"Follow me," encourages the Professor.

Beatrice allows her jaw to fall open, staring in awe at the room in front of her. It is a kitchen, that is certain, but everything is very small.

"Oh! Professor Granger, what is you needing Miss?" asks a small elf, but Beatrice feels rather disappointed when she notices it isn't Gimp.

"Hello, Quigley," smiles the Professor. "I was wondering if Beatrice and I might have a cup of hot cocoa?"

"Oh, yes, right away Miss, Quigley is happy to make this for Miss Granger and the young Miss," he grins before he scurries away.

Professor Granger beckons Beatrice to join her on a small chair by the door before asking her what her brain is thinking about.

"Lots of things," she begins. Professor Granger understands, her brain works in a similar fashion.

"I was thinking about how big the castle is, and also about all the different hallways and stairs," she continues. "I was trying to trace the path to the dungeons in my head."

"Why the dungeons?" the Professor asks, her expression one of concern. Professor Granger worries for a moment that Beatrice may be afraid of the dungeons. She supposes they are rather dark, dreary, and cold, a stark contrast to the rest of the school.

"That's where the potions are," Beatrice grins. "And my friend Professor Malfoy."

A small blush forms on the Professor's cheeks, though one would only notice it if they looked very closely. "Oh, I see," she smiles, thankful that any of her previous worries regarding Malfoy's

behaviour with the muggleborns had proved to be superfluous.

“Well, tomorrow perhaps you can ask Professor Malfoy to show you the route to the Dungeons,” she suggests, trying to imagine what on earth Malfoy had done for Beatrice to consider him her friend.

“Good idea,” Beatrice agrees, a genuine smile spread across her face.

Quigley reappears with two mugs of cocoa in hand, tiny marshmallows floating across the surface. “Here you goes Misses,” he says with an enormous grin on his face. Beatrice thinks he’s very funny looking, especially because one of his ears flops, while the other stands straight.

“Thank you, Quigley,” the Professor smiles. Hermione has always enjoyed hot cocoa, one of the very few sweets that her parents made throughout her childhood. It reminds her of Christmas time, of rosy cheeks from hours out in the snow, a crackling fire, and the excitement of receiving new books from Father Christmas.

“Would you like me to tell you a story?” asks Professor Granger, already summoning a small bag towards her. She begins to riffle through it, and Beatrice can’t help but wonder why, for it is a very small bag.

“Here we are,” she smiles, removing a book with a bright yellow cover.

Hermione had been seven years old when she peeled the blue and white wrapping paper away from this very book. She had gawked at it for a moment, taking in the lion with flowers in his mane, the smiling scarecrow, the funny-looking tin man, and the beautiful girl. A castle of some kind could be seen in the distance, one that Hermione had wished to visit someday.

Hermione had dreamt of Oz for many years, reading the book more times than she could even count. She loved Glinda the Good, and Dorothy’s red slippers. For three separate Halloweens, she wore a blue-chequered dress, her hair weaved into two plaits, and a pair of red slippers that were far too large for her feet.

You can imagine how excited she was when she found out that witches like Glinda are real, even more so when she realised that she too, could be like Glinda the Good.

Hermione begins flipping through the pages, using the images to tell an abridged version of the story she knew by heart. She believes Dorothy’s journey to Oz to be the perfect tale to read to Beatrice, for she too had been swept up and carried off into an unfamiliar world.

“When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side,”

October 31, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

“Granger, what on earth is that?” Malfoy asks, staring at her with a furrowed brow.

“A costume,” she replies simply, her tone assured, though anyone who knows Hermione well would realise that she was slightly hurt by his remark.

“Well I was certainly hoping so,” he adds with a smirk. “But *what* is it?” he clarifies.

“Oh, it’s Dorothy, from the Wizard of Oz.” She looks down at her feet, her bright red slippers reflecting the light from the windows overhead.

“I’m sorry, *what* wizard?” Draco asks. He wonders if Granger has some kind of fever, mostly because he’s never seen her in anything so ... flashy.

He can count on one hand how many variations of clothing Granger owns. First, she has the standard black robes that she wears most days, her hair tossed haphazardly in a bun. Then, she has her fancy blue robes, the ones that Malfoy thinks compliment her complexion the best. He makes sure to tell her she looks positively ghastly every time she wears them for this reason.

Next, she has her muggle denims, which she usually wears with a knitted sweater of some kind. Draco always knows she’s going to be in a particularly spunky mood when she arrives in such an ensemble.

He thinks she probably still has her Hogwarts uniform as well. He assumes she wears it around her flat, just to feel like she’s reliving her glory days like the swot that she is. Though, he supposes that Granger’s *glory days* are actually just the rest of her life.

But today, this combination of clothing is certainly ... peculiar. For one, she’s wearing a short chequered blue and white dress, the hem falling just below the knee. By Granger’s standards, this is practically *scantily clad*. She’s paired it with bright red shoes, ones that certainly do not pass lab protocol. He will have to bring this up with her.

And then, perhaps the most offputting aspect of it all is her hair. Her typically unruly mess of curls is tamed today, tightly wound into two plaits, falling over either shoulder.

“It’s a character in a book,” she begins as she rolls her eyes. “It’s also a movie, The Wizard of Oz?” she stares at him with an expression of displeasure, one that Draco secretly loves to be on the receiving end of. “Honestly, do you live under a rock?” she adds, her intonation rising ever so slightly.

Malfoy grins, raising his eyebrow at her, simply because he knows she hates when he looks at her like that.

“It’s Halloween Malfoy, where’s your costume?” she asks, as if him opting to wear normal, civilised clothing is offensive, rather than practical.

“I am wearing a costume,” he jests, feigning offence.

“What are you supposed to be, then?”

“A lab assistant, Granger, hence why my clothing choices follow lab protocol.”

“You just don’t know how to have fun,” she retorts. She purses her lips ever-so-slightly, the way that she usually does when she thinks she’s had the last word. Malfoy thinks she should know better by this point. They’d been working together for over a year now.

“Granger, have you ever stopped to think that perhaps my brand of fun just doesn’t involve dressing up like Weasley’s wet dream?”

This remark shocks her because for a split second she realises that for him to consider her to be anyone's sexual fantasy must mean that he too ...

She stops her train of thought before it can go any further.

"I can assure you that is factually incorrect," she retorts. She knows for certain that he is wrong, because a few months after their eighth year, Ron had ended things with her rather abruptly after admitting that he was in love with Dean Thomas.

"Oh?" Malfoy replies simply, attempting to goad her into an explanation. She refuses to give in.

"We have an hour before Professor Bates arrives. Did you bring what I asked you to?" she asks, attempting to steer the conversation away from her costume that she was slowly starting to regret wearing.

"Yes, Granger, though why you need Abraxan hair, fairy wings and Horklump juice is beyond me."

"Stop questioning me and start brewing," she scolds.

"Aye Aye Captain," he salutes.

When their cups of cocoa are empty, and Dorothy's tale comes to a close, the two witches head back upstairs. Hermione tucks Beatrice into bed and wishes her goodnight. Within moments, she drifts off to sleep, deciding that she has plenty of time to discover the castle and all its corridors, passages, paintings, and stairs.

The next morning, Hermione wakes up feeling like she'd hardly slept at all. She knows she had to have gotten at least four hours of sleep, but, then again, she isn't the 17-year-old that used to stay up at all hours keeping watch over the tent, Ron and Harry sleeping soundly inside. Now, if Hermione gets anything less than the recommended eight hours of sleep, she needs a pepper-up potion just to make it through the day.

But, she pries herself out of the comfort of her bed and prepares herself for the day, because Hermione has never been someone to let something such as a lack of sleep stop her from accomplishing whatever needs to be done.

Hermione knows that Luna, Neville, and Malfoy are in charge of getting all the children up and ready this morning and that Remus will be escorting all the parents in from Hogsmeade, but she can't help but feel as if she's forgetting something.

As she weaves her way through the halls, she runs through a checklist in her mind. It does seem as if everything has been taken care of, but she can't shake the feeling of uneasiness that's slowly growing in her gut.

She shakes her head, realising that this feeling is likely due to a lack of sleep. Yes, that's it.

"Once you've reached this portrait of Sir Cadogan, you know you're on the right track," she hears suddenly. Quickening her pace and rounding a bend, Hermione comes face to face with Professor Malfoy and a very excited Beatrice and Elizabeth.

“Oh! Professor Malfoy, hello!” she begins, feeling a little flustered. “And good morning Beatrice, Elizabeth, did you sleep well?” she asks, a twinkle in her eye.

Ignoring her question entirely, Beatrice declares that Professor Malfoy is showing them the way to the dungeons. Ah yes, *that* is what Hermione had forgotten.

“Oh! Well, that’s a lovely idea.” She glances toward Malfoy, noticing that he’s standing there in silence, looking rather awkward.

“Well, I’ll leave you to it,” she smiles. “I’ll see you at breakfast.”

"Come follow me, dear friends, and we shall find our goal, or else shall perish bravely in the charge!" Sir Cadogan bellows, racing through his neighbouring portraits. The girls giggle and follow along as Professor Malfoy struggles to keep up. He wonders why Granger pretended as if she wasn’t the one to suggest this idea to Beatrice.

“Now, your children will be following a predetermined schedule during their first two years at Hogwarts,” Professor Granger explains, flicking her wand toward the board behind her. The chalk raises into the air and scribes as she speaks.

“Their core subjects are Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, History of Magic, Defence Against the Dark Arts, Astronomy and Herbology. I will explain what these subjects are at length later today,” she continues.

Professor Malfoy looks around the room, noticing that quite a few of the parents are not paying attention to Granger’s presentation. He takes his time inspecting each parent, noting which ones were looking towards her with wrapt attention, and those that looked like they would rather be anywhere else.

The meeting today is taking place in her charms classroom, a classroom that Malfoy has always been quite partial to. And no, it certainly isn’t because he had had charms with a certain bushy-haired Gryffindor practically every term. And it also definitely was not because of the way the sunlight would seep through the windows, illuminating her in a glow as she diligently scribbled away at her parchment. No, it was certainly not.

“At the end of their second year, the students may choose a minimum of two additional subjects from the following list, Arithmancy, Muggle Studies, Divination, Study of Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures,” she continues. Malfoy smiles at this, remembering when Granger had admitted to the time-turner fiasco that was her third year. Though he doesn’t know if she remembers telling him about it, they had consumed a fair bit of elf wine at the time.

“During their fifth year, students will have an appointment with their Head of House to discuss job prospects, as well as what courses they would need for these paths.” This causes Malfoy to pause his train of thought, realising for the first time that he would be expected to carry out this duty in a few months. He shudders slightly at the idea, mostly because he’s unsure if he’ll be able to encourage students if he knows they are on a path that they will fail at.

Granger continues to drawl on about O.W.L and N.E.W.T-level classes, and Malfoy grows bored. He zones in on the parents once more, attempting to guess what they may be thinking about. The lady he recognises as Elizabeth’s mother is sitting in the front row, feverishly scribbling all of this

information onto a piece of parchment with one of the odd writing utensils he's seen Granger use from time to time.

There's another man towards the back of the class that's looking at Professor Granger with a concerning sort of expression. Draco decides he doesn't like the looks of him one bit.

He pokes into his mind ever-so-slightly, assuring himself that it's only because he's worried for Granger's safety. The man looks rather suspicious after all.

bend her over that desk

Draco swiftly pulls out of his mind, disgusted by what he found. The man's wife is sitting right next to him! These muggles, Draco thinks, are absolutely barbaric. How dare he think such a thing?

Now, Professor Malfoy would never admit to such a thing, but as he turns his attention back to Professor Granger, who is now explaining the four houses, he realises she would look rather good in the position that the muggle man had been thinking of.

"Professor Malfoy," he hears suddenly, causing him to snap out of whatever cursed train of thought he had been on.

"Would you care to explain Quidditch?" she asks kindly. "Quidditch isn't really my cup of tea," she explains to the parents with a laugh.

"Certainly," he says as he walks to the front of the class. Malfoy realises just now that he hasn't a clue how to explain a sport he grew up with to people who have never heard of such a thing.

"Now, I've been told that Quidditch is rather similar to a sport you muggles enjoy, -er, football?" he starts, his tone uncertain. He notices a few of the fathers nodding eagerly.

Emboldened, he flips the board over and levitates the chalk with his wand, sketching out the pitch. "The game is rather simple. It's played by two teams of seven people and involves four balls," he adds this information to the board.

"three Chasers, two Beaters, one Keeper, and one Seeker..."

Professor Granger sits propped against the window ledge to his right, watching him explain the game. As she starts to understand the complexities of the sport, small things that had been previously incomprehensible to her, she realises that Malfoy is a rather good teacher after all.



art by [votintseva_art](#)

Chapter End Notes

The version of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* that I envisioned Hermione reading is the 1982 edition, published by Henry Holt and Co.

This is also our first flashback scene! From now on, there will be quite a few of these incorporated into the chapters so that we can begin to understand Hermione and Draco's past.

More Wolfstar content is on the horizon, I promise!

Diagon Alley

Chapter Notes

Thank you again to all of you who are following along and leaving comments and kudos!! This fic has become a passion project for me and it makes me smile to know that there are folks out there who are enjoying reading it. Once again, please follow my TikTok, Twitter and Instagram (embersofapril) for updates on this story :)

Three mini flashbacks in today's chapter because Draco and Hermione do indeed have a HISTORY! Also, some more Sirius and Cassie towards the end of the chapter.

This is the last chapter before the start of term, so be prepared to buckle in.

Please see the chapter end notes for translations. (Yes, you know what that means)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

From time to time, you may hear crowds of rambunctious muggles arguing over which pub in London is the oldest, and therefore the most deserving, of their patronage. They may yell their support of the White Hart on Drury Lane, or perhaps Angel on Bermondsey Wall. If they are very drunk, they may even suggest The Lamb and Flag on Rose Street.

Despite their passion on the matter, all of these muggles are unfortunately incorrect. The oldest pub in London, as any knowledgeable witch or wizard will tell you, is the Leaky Cauldron on Charing Cross Road.

This famed establishment is nestled between a bookshop and a record store. To the average muggle who may pass by, it appears to be a broken-down shop front and a rather unassuming one at that.

However, at 1 Diagon Alley is the very same building, though it appears altogether different, and certainly much more welcoming. This quaint pub was built by Daisy Dodderidge in the early 1500s as she sought to create a gateway of sorts, one that connects the non-wizarding world to Diagon Alley.

The Leaky Cauldron in all its glory has changed very little over the years, forever remaining the ideal spot for one to catch up with all the latest wizarding gossip. In fact, if a witch or wizard is to find a comfortable seat towards the back of the room, they are sure to remain entertained for as long as they so desire. This is of course because it is a common meeting point for weary travellers, as well as an exceptionally good spot for people-watching.

Today the Leaky Cauldron is uncommonly full, but it would certainly please Daisy Dodderidge to learn that her dream of connecting the wizarding world to that of muggles has indeed come to pass.

“May I please have everyone’s attention?” exclaims Professor Granger. She waves her hands around in the air in an attempt to draw the people’s eyes toward her, though no one seems to be paying attention.

She lets out an exasperated sigh as Hannah Abbott, The Leaky Cauldron's newest landlady, bustles about the room, serving all the muggleborn students' parents fresh cups of coffee before they set out into Diagon Alley.

"YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!" can suddenly be heard by all of those present at the Leaky, their eyes all turning to face a very displeased Professor Malfoy, his wand pointed at his throat.

"If you would please give Professor Granger your full and undivided attention, that would be greatly appreciated," he smiles, though it is the sort of smile that parents may give to their children after they misbehaved, rather than one of joy.

"Yes, er, thank you, Professor Malfoy," she continues. "Now, as previously mentioned, you will stick with your assigned member of staff today."

One father rolls his eyes—he'd much rather stay at this pub than go shopping for school supplies all day. He huffs and leans back in his chair, not taking a moment to notice how saddened his son seems to be by his lack of excitement.

"Your first stop will be Gringotts, the wizarding bank, to exchange your currency," she explains. "After that, each group will be able to take as long as they need to fetch all their supplies before returning to Hogsmeade."

Draco glances toward Beatrice. She is sitting, quite literally, on the edge of her seat, her eyes glued in Granger's direction. He smiles ever-so-slightly at this, feeling for a moment as if he'd been transported back to the day he first saw another muggleborn witch acting similarly.

After an uneventful encounter with the Goblins of Gringotts, whom Beatrice decides she doesn't like in the slightest, Draco and the Murphy family head towards Ollivanders.

"Elizabeth!" the girl exclaims suddenly, running towards her friend. Draco tenses his shoulders, very aware of who will be close behind the Beverly family. He watches the two girls discuss their shopping list with great excitement, both sets of eyes lighting up at the idea of receiving their own wand.

"Would you like to join us, Beatrice?" Professor Granger asks, her eyes darting quickly toward Draco. The girls bounce up and down, holding each other's hands at the idea.

Hermione can't help but grin. she loves watching friendships bloom between her first-year students. She knows that the earliest friendships formed at Hogwarts are usually those that last a lifetime.

Professor Malfoy leads the group towards the small wand shop while eavesdropping on Granger's conversation with the parents. "It's likely that they'll have to try out a few different wands before one picks them," she explains.

"I'm sorry, did you say the wand picks them?" Mrs. Beverly clarifies.

"Yes, you'll see what I mean shortly," Hermione smiles.

They arrive at the shop, the narrow storefront recently spruced up by the new owner, Orpheus Ollivander, Garrick Ollivander's nephew. The gold letters over the door read: Ollivanders: Makers

of Fine Wands since 382 B.C.

Draco smiles to himself, the day he got his first wand is one of his fondest memories. It was 10 inches long, made of hawthorn wood, and had a unicorn hair core. Though he had not seen that wand for many, many years.

He remembers how excited he had been, to finally be a *real* wizard. He had felt the possibilities of his existence stretching out in front of him, each one more enticing than the last. He could imagine himself as top of his class, quidditch captain, maybe even head boy. He could see how proud his father would be of him if he were to achieve all these things. He could hardly wait.

Sometimes Draco wishes he could go back in time and speak with his eleven-year-old self. He would tell him all the secrets of his future and beg him not to follow the path that he had. He had even looked for a time-turner at one point, searching far and wide. Unfortunately, they had all been destroyed after the war, but Draco is thankful for this now because he has accepted that time is a loop, and you cannot change that which has already occurred.

They enter into the crowded space, thousands of narrow boxes stacked haphazardly amongst the shelves. Draco does admit, however, it is certainly less dusty in here since the arrival of the new owner.

“Ah! Professor Granger,” the man at the desk smiles, extending his arms out in front of him in a welcome.

“Hello Orpheus, how are you today?” she replies. Hermione has always found Orpheus to be an extremely attractive man, though also rather eccentric. The first time she entered the shop a few years prior, he’d been at the counter, causing her to stop dead in her tracks and stare. It had been rather rude, now that she thinks about it.

“I’m doing just lovely,” he grins, “though my day has certainly brightened now that you’re here.”

Draco rolls his eyes, noticing his French accent straight away. He’s not entirely sure why his remark towards Granger has bothered him as much as it has. “Did you go to Beauxbatons?” he inquires, deciding that he needs to know who this man is immediately.

“I did, yes,” the man replies, his tone uncertain.

“Et à Beauxbatons, ils vous enseignent à tenter de séduire chaque sorcière que vous rencontrez, Monsieur Ollivander?” he inquires.

Orpheus looks to him in shock, “Non, je suis désolé si je vous ai offensé monsieur.”

Draco only nods his head, looking towards Granger.

She’s glancing at him with a confused look on her face, but one that allows for Draco to determine that she’s annoyed *because* she’s confused. He’d seen her with such an expression many times now.

March 22, 2000, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

“That’s not going to work, Granger, I can promise you,” Draco spits with a snarl.

“And why not?” she yells back, flipping through her textbook in a fury. “We’ll never know if we don’t try.”

Draco lowers his voice to almost a whisper, “Well I have tried, okay? Are you happy?” he asks, his eyes filled with fury.

“You’ve tried every ingredient with healing properties,” she confirms, her expression suddenly very focused.

“Yes, and various combinations as well. Please just drop it.”

Hermione remains silent for a moment and Draco starts to worry—he’s never been around Granger in silence for this long ever before. She tilts her head to the side slightly, her eyes glazed over as she bites her lip in concentration. Draco can feel his stomach flutter as he observes her, suddenly very aware of the lack of space between them.

“I don’t understand,” she exclaims suddenly, her face scrunched up in confusion.

“Well, welcome to the real-world Granger, where not every problem can be solved by a textbook.”

She stares at him with a fire in her eyes. “I’ll figure it out,” she smiles. Draco knows that this isn’t a joyous smile, it’s one of vigorous determination.

“I’m sure you will,” he mutters under his breath.

Hermione can feel her brain whirring, attempting to decipher what Malfoy had said to Orpheus. It bothers her that she doesn’t have all the information that she needs to dissect the situation.

Snapping out of it and coming back to the present, she asks, “Elizabeth, would you like to go first?”

Hermione’s favourite part of the trip to Diagon Alley with the muggleborn first years is unquestionably their visit to Ollivander’s. She believes there is no magic quite as beautiful as a child experiencing it for the very first time.

She remembers how amazing it had felt, the first time she held her wand. She felt as if it had healed something inside of her, like it had stitched her together and tied the string. The magic had flowed through her body, her fingertips tingling, begging for her to cast a spell.

The wand in her hand at this very moment had been the first object that she purchased in her new world, a 10¾ inches long vine wood wand with a dragon heartstring core.

Elizabeth steps forward tentatively, Orpheus staring down at her. “I know just the thing,” he smiles, disappearing into the shelves.

The young witch looks back at her mother nervously, shifting from one foot to the other. “Ah, here we are!” Orpheus exclaims, emerging once more. He opens the brown box and passes the wand towards Elizabeth, who accepts it with an outstretched hand.

She holds it in front of her, staring at it. She wonders what’s supposed to happen because she doesn’t feel any difference at all.

“Well, give it a wave!” Orpheus encourages.

She furrows her brow and waves the wand, feeling rather silly while doing it. Suddenly, the mug on the counter in front of her bursts into pieces, causing her mother to shriek.

She shakes her head before gently handing it back to the wizard. He returns to the shelves once more, muttering to himself.

Elizabeth looks back at Bea with fear, worrying that maybe she isn't a witch after all.

The man arrives at the counter once more, a grin on his face. "I'm certain about this one," he whispers.

Elizabeth grabs the wand and immediately feels a difference. The feeling reminds her of standing in the rain, the water grazing her skin. She feels like there's a bolt of electricity moving through her, causing her fingers to tingle. She gives it a wave excitedly, tiny lights resembling fireflies appearing around her.

Her mother starts to cry as her father stares at her in awe. It wasn't that her parents doubted she was a witch. They've always known she was something special. However, it's altogether a different experience to witness her using magic, rather than simply being told that she could.

"Yes, there we are," smiles Ollivander. "11 inches, pearwood, with unicorn hair, supple flexibility."

Hermione's mind takes off once more, wand lore a longtime interest of hers. She's always found the science of wands to be fascinating, especially when you consider the ways wandmakers make use of alchemy. After studying the meanings of the various cores and woods, Hermione believes wands to be a surprisingly accurate indicator of people's character.

Elizabeth's, for instance, is made of golden-toned pear wood, which is known to be used in wands of splendid magical powers. Most witches or wizards who use a pear wand are considered to be warm-hearted, generous, wise and typically very well-respected. They are also the least conducive to dark magic while remaining extremely resilient. Hermione finds this to be interesting because it is well paired with the unicorn hair, which also rarely turns towards dark magic, while generally being considered a very faithful wand.

"Young lady," Ollivander gestures towards Beatrice, who looks towards him in fear. She remains frozen in place, unphased by the grinning Elizabeth standing next to her.

Draco looks to her mother with a knowing look before kneeling next to the girl. "Are you excited to use your wand to make all those potions I told you about?" he asks.

She nods wearily in response before taking a small step forward.

Hermione cranes her neck in their direction, attempting to determine what Malfoy had said to the girl for her to move forward so suddenly.

Ollivander looks down at Beatrice with squinting eyes, tilting his head from left to right. He mutters to himself as he heads to the back of the store. Beatrice's parents share a worried look.

Orpheus emerges from the shelves with two boxes in hand, one a sleek black, and one a very weathered green. Beatrice secretly hopes she gets the one in the nice box.

He passes this one to her first with a hopeful gleam in his eyes. Bea reaches out eagerly, giving it a wave before he even has to ask.

The potted plant next to the cash breaks suddenly, dirt tumbling to the floor. Beatrice cringes, passing the wand back to the man. He looks disappointed, though Bea can't understand why.

He leaves the weathered green box on the counter as he returns to the stacks, returning with three other options. After three more attempts with no luck and even more broken objects, Beatrice can't help but feel defeated.

Orpheus sighs before handing over the wand from the green box. She accepts it hesitantly, ready to feel her stomach drop in disappointment once more.

But this time, it's different. Beatrice would describe magic as feeling like honey dripping off of a spoon, the honey her mother adds to her tea, and the sweetness of it. She feels like she has more energy inside her than she ever has, and her hand begins to shake. She waves the wand suddenly, the air around her picking up and whipping her hair around her face.

She holds her breath as the wind settles, looking up at Ollivander with a cautious smile. "My dear, this wand is 12 1/4 inches," he begins. "Made of Elm wood with a phoenix core."

Both Hermione and Draco look up suddenly at this declaration, her eyes looking towards him immediately. Hermione wonders what he thinks of this, a muggleborn with an elm wand, and a phoenix core at that.

It was previously believed, and still is by some, that only pure-bloods can produce magic from elm wands. This has since been disproved, but it makes Hermione quite happy to see living proof. The truth, rather, is that elm wands prefer witches and wizards with a presence and a certain magical dexterity. They are known for being exceptional for charms and spells and are considered to be the most sophisticated of the woods.

But even more shocking is perhaps the phoenix feather core, the rarest of the cores. They are capable of the greatest range of magic and are thought to be the pickiest of the wand cores, mostly because the creature from which they originate is a being of independence.

As a matter of fact, Draco finds this to be remarkable, a feeling quite similar to pride growing in his chest.

The next stop for Elizabeth and Bea, and by association Draco and Hermione, is Flourish and Blotts.

The store is filled to the brim with books, shelves upon shelves lining the walls from ceiling to floor. It is very disorganised, yet simultaneously orderly, for there was a method to the madness. Hermione seems to understand this method quite well as she weaves through the stacks, levitating books toward the girls' outstretched baskets.

Draco trails behind the group looking around the space, taking note of all the students. He feels like it is all very surreal, as if he hadn't yet clued into the fact that he would indeed be teaching in a few short days.

“Professor Malfoy, can you help please?” he hears suddenly. Granger is facing him with a stack of books outstretched. He grabs hold of them reluctantly.

They all walk to the cash register, having to push their way through the hordes of students. Draco tries to remember a time he’d seen it as busy as this, apart from perhaps the time Gilderoy Lockhart hosted his book signing.

August 28th, 1992, Flourish and Blotts, Diagon Alley

“And you must be, the Granger girl,” Draco’s father drawls, his eyes staring down at Hermione.

She puts on a face of indignation, staring back up at the man as she nods.

“Yes, Draco has told me *all* about you,” his father continues. Draco rolls his eyes internally, a feeling of embarrassment arising in his gut. He decides that he’s already well and fed up with his father’s dramatics. His father Lucius knows how he is perceived and takes great pride in maintaining this image in wizarding society.

“So Draco, that was the girl who’s first in your class?” his father asks as they step out of the floor and into the parlour. His father’s smirk does nothing to inspire a response from Draco.

“Well it was certainly lovely to put a face to the name of the girl your mother and I hear about so often,” he continues, clearly not deterred by Draco’s lack of response.

Draco hadn’t realised that he spoke of the girl so much. He found her to be irritating, an insufferable know-it-all, and teacher’s pet. He couldn’t stand her. He couldn’t stand her stupid bushy hair or the way she waved her arm around, practically squirming in her seat when she knew the answer to a question. No, she certainly irritated him to no end, something he thought about quite a lot.

“If it’s alright with all of you, I’m going to pop into one more store, then I’ll join you back at the Leaky Cauldron for lunch,” smiles Hermione. With a wave, she heads down the street, and Draco knows immediately where she’s headed.

Cornerstone Bookstore is Hermione’s favourite shop in Diagon Alley. Some might assume that this title would be held by Flourish and Blotts, the place where Hogwarts students buy their textbooks. Though her reputation for being an insufferable know-it-all precedes her, Hermione much prefers literature to textbooks. Cornerstone is filled with novels written by witches, wizards and muggles. There is also one memoir written by a house elf that they carry, one Hermione has been meaning to buy.

It’s a cosy sort of store, and out of the hustle and bustle of the main area of Diagon Alley. In the centre of the store is a metal spiral staircase leading up to a loft of sorts. There are reading nooks spread out through the space that Hermione used to enjoy for hours on end.

August 30th, 1998, Cornerstone Books, Diagon Alley

It was getting late, just a quarter of an hour until Cornerstone would close. Hermione had already completed all her back-to-school shopping for her eighth and final year at Hogwarts, but she didn’t

feel like she'd made all the stops she had wanted to when she had come earlier with Ron and Harry.

No, Hermione couldn't bear the thought of heading to Hogwarts again without visiting her favourite store. She breathes in the smell of books as she enters the room, a grin spreading across her face. She makes a beeline for the back where the romance section could be found. Tilting her head to the right to read the titles, she drags her hand across the spines.

"Granger?" she hears from behind her. She whips her head around towards the source of the noise, still rather jumpy just a few short months after the Battle of Hogwarts.

"Oh, Malfoy, hello," she replies wearily, not meeting his eyes.

He stares at her in silence, before blinking suddenly, as if remembering himself. "And where are your two loyal henchmen this evening?" he asks with his usual snark.

Hermione rolls her eyes, hardly surprised that Draco Malfoy had somehow managed to remain unchanged by the war. "I suspect they're at the Leaky," she replies simply. She nearly retorts asking him where *his* henchmen are before remembering that one of them had passed during the battle. She decides she isn't cruel enough to make such a comment.

"You're returning to Hogwarts this year?" he asks suddenly. Hermione frowns slightly, confused by his tone, which makes it seem like he's genuinely curious.

"Yes, and you?" she asks, looking to meet his glance.

"Unfortunately, yes," he replies, his demeanour abruptly changing from self-assured to awkward.

"Well, I'll see you there, I suppose," she replies simply, turning to leave, absolutely befuddled by the entire encounter.

He nods.

"Mione!" Cassie screeches as she sees Hermione enter the Leaky Cauldron. "Did you rob the bookstore?" she asks with a grin, noticing the stack of books in front of her.

Hermione laughs before catching Draco's eye from across the room. When she turns towards him, it is apparent that he had already been looking at her. Hermione's skin tingles as she realises this.

"Did you get all your stuff?" Hermione asks, glancing toward the bags on the bench next to Cassie.

"Yes, and your alchemy textbook is stupidly large," she laughs, hoisting the volume out of its bag. Hermione has to admit that is comically large, but it is undoubtedly the best Alchemy textbook there is in her opinion.

"There you are miss Mione," grins Sirius, pulling her into a hug. "How are all the firsties?" he asks.

But Hermione isn't listening as well as she should be. She's staring in the direction of Professor Malfoy. Sirius follows her gaze, gasping dramatically when he determines where she's looking.

"Is that my dear cousin?" he asks in a whisper, which startles Hermione out of her trance.

“Yes, it is,” she replies carefully, looking anywhere but Sirius.

“Cassie,” he says, turning towards his daughter, “come meet a dear member of the house of Black with me, will ya?” He has a devilish sort of look on his face.

Hermione panics, following behind them, worried about what Sirius might say.

“Hello, dear cousin,” he says, tapping Draco on the shoulder.

Draco takes one look at Sirius and stands immediately guiding him away from the Beverly and Murphy families he had been sitting with.

“Cassie, this is Draco Malfoy,” Sirius begins, clearly not caring that Draco appears rather uncomfortable. He dramatically drops his upper half into a bow while gesturing towards Cassie.

“Cassie Lupin-Black,” she grins, extending her hand towards him with a greedy sort of look in her eyes.

Hermione rolls her eyes. She already knows what her goddaughter is thinking. “Cassie, Professor Malfoy will be teaching potions this year,” Hermione adds quickly, not wanting Cassie to begin trying to flirt with Malfoy.

Cassie’s eyes light up suddenly before she turns to face Hermione, wiggling her eyebrows in her direction.

“How splendid,” she grins, now looking towards her father.

As they walk back toward Elizabeth and Beatrice’s families, Hermione apologises to Draco for the encounter.

“Not to worry, Granger,” he begins. “Though Lupin’s daughter appears to be quite the character,” he drawls.

“She’s my goddaughter,” Hermione adds. She feels inclined to tell him for some odd reason.

“That explains it,” he smirks. It’s the smirk that Hermione knows he uses when he wants to come across as confrontational. But over time she’s learned it’s all an act, a defence mechanism.

At dinner that evening, Hermione doesn’t hear the end of *Professor Malfoy* .

“So that’s the infamous Oxford Malfoy,” Cassie screeches with a grin on her face.

“Hermione, you never told me he looks like THAT!”

Hermione purses her lips and crosses her arms, deciding to not give into Cassie’s taunting.

“And you’re working together now? Imagine the encounters you’ll have!” she continues, floating around dramatically, acting as if she’s in a Shakespearean play. She is Sirius’s daughter, after all.

“Oh, I can’t wait,” she smiles.

“Don’t say or do anything, Cassandra,” Hermione threatens, though her request doesn’t have the edge of authority that she was hoping for.

“I’m just going to sit back, watch, and enjoy the show,” the girl grins, fanning herself with her hand.

Chapter End Notes

“Et à Beauxbatons, ils vous apprennent qu’il faut tenter de séduire chaque sorcière que vous rencontrez, Monsieur Ollivander ?” = And at Beauxbatons, do they teach you to try and seduce with every witch that you meet, Mr. Ollivander?

“Non, je suis désolé si je vous ai offensé monsieur.” = No, I am sorry if I have offended you sir.

*Please note that I speak Canadian french so I may use Québécois words by accident from time to time. Please feel free to call me out on this if you are French and notice an error!

P.S. Cornerstone is a little reference to the masterpieces that are The Right Thing To Do / All The Wrong Things by lovesbitca8, the first Dramione fanfiction I ever read. It only felt right to work it into my story!

The Hogwarts Express

Chapter Notes

It's officially September 1st! I hope you enjoy our journey back to Hogwarts. There's also another Oxford flashback that sheds some light on what they're up to in the Alchemy lab.

As always I really appreciate all your comments and kudos, so thank you to all of those who continue to engage with each chapter! :)

Please note that any time I reference a Marauders prank, you can assume that it's from All The Young Dudes Years 1-7 by MsKingBean89 (which is canon to me at this point).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If you happen to find yourself at King's Cross Station in London on the first day of September, you may notice something rather bizarre. If you position yourselves between platforms nine and ten, perhaps with a warm coffee to keep yourself occupied, you will surely notice various people disappearing seemingly into thin air, or rather through a quite solid-looking brick wall.

But make no mistake, they are not *disappearing* but passing through into a very real and functional platform—platform nine and three quarters, that is. On the other side of this wall, you will find a bright red 4-6-0 steam engine called The Hogwarts Express. This platform is always full on the first of September, with children from the ages of eleven to seventeen running about, their parents chasing after them with forgotten belongings. It's quite the sight, but don't be late, because the train leaves promptly at 11 o'clock in the morning.

Professor Malfoy finds it quite ridiculous that he's being forced to transport muggleborn students from Hogsmeade to platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ just for them to ride the train right back to where they started. After his sixth and final time passing through the floo at the Three Broomsticks, he actually curses under his breath at the foolishness of it all.

"Sorry, what was that Malfoy?" Professor Granger asks with a smirk.

"Why are we doing this again?" Draco replies, though he already knows the answer. This very situation had been detailed ad nauseam on page 285 of Granger's information package.

"Because, Malfoy, arriving on the train is an essential part of the Hogwarts experience," she begins, exasperated. "If we were to keep the students here, that would immediately set them apart from the rest, which is the exact opposite of what we're trying to accomplish!"

Draco grins to himself, finding it rather humorous how intense Granger can become within a split second as a result of his intentional goading. Though what he finds even funnier is that she's using her *lecturing* voice with him, one that used to be reserved for Potter and Weasley. He notices that her nose is all scrunched up and her brows furrowed.

“... if they weren’t to come across the lake on the boats with Hagrid, that would be *othering* them, alerting the other students that there’s something different about them,” she continues on. Draco doesn’t stop her. In fact, he sees his opportunity to keep her going.

“But there is something different about them,” he suggests innocently, dusting some lingering floo powder off his robes. Draco takes great pleasure in seeing Granger get to the point of exasperation. Her eyes narrowed as she babbles on.

“I beg your pardon!” she practically shouts, muttering to herself about purebloods and prejudice.

“Well, they’ve already been to Hogwarts,” he adds with a smirk. “That’s different.”

She stares at him “You’re incorrigible.”

“So I’ve been told.”

Professor Granger immediately starts to worry about how all the students are faring on the train.

“Where should we sit?” asks Elizabeth as she and Bea weave their way through the train.

“You pick,” replies Bea, not liking to be one to make decisions. She’s quite happy to follow Elizabeth’s lead.

“How’s this one?” Elizabeth asks, pointing towards a compartment with one rather small boy inside.

“Err, ok,” Bea agrees reluctantly, eyeing the boy suspiciously.

“Hullo,” beams Elizabeth.

The boy turns to face them with a worried look on his face. “Did you want this compartment?” he asks. “I can leave.”

“Nono, you can stay,” she smiles, extending her hand toward him. “I’m Elizabeth Beverly, and this is Bea Murphy.”

“Caelus Wood,” he replies, accepting her hand hesitantly. He’s wearing a knit jumper and square glasses. He adjusts them nervously.

“Cool name,” smiles Bea.

“My dad’s big into quidditch, wanted to name me after something to do with that, but my mum wouldn’t let him,” he explains. “So they landed on Caelus, it means sky.”

“Quidditch is the sport, right? The one on brooms?” Bea clarifies. She had only been half listening when Professor Hooch had explained it. She knows the gist of the sport but realises that this might be something the boy would be interested in discussing.

The boy looks confused for a moment.

“We’re muggleborn,” Elizabeth explains.

“Oh!” he exclaims, quickly launching into an in-depth explanation of the game. Bea’s only half listening, but she’s glad he has something to talk about to make him feel more comfortable.

Cassie walks up and down the corridor of the train, checking in on all the students. She can’t help but feel nostalgic at the fact this is her last September 1st on the train. She can still remember her first trip on the bright red steam engine. She’d been so excited to arrive at the castle that she’d grown up picturing as the backdrop of all her fathers’ stories.

From her bedroom in Hogsmede, she could see the castle off in the distance, and even watch her father walk down the lane toward its entrance.

She’d dreamt of its halls, corridors, secret passageways and portraits since the first story she’d heard from Sirius—a prank that he, Remus, and their friends, deemed the *Marauders*, had pulled off in their fourth year.

Cassie had expressed how much she hated her alarm clock a few days after her adoption, confessing that she’d rather stay in bed for the rest of the day. Sirius had grinned at this, which had confused her at the time. Why would any parent encourage their child to stay in bed all day?

He’d conjured a Gryffindor red armchair and taken a seat next to her bed, launching into a grand retelling of what he deemed to be one of the best pranks Hogwarts had ever seen.

He said that it had been Remus’s idea, though Cassie didn’t really believe him—she could already tell that Remus was the voice of reason within her fathers’ relationship.

According to Sirius, all the clocks within Hogwarts are controlled by one master clock, the big one outside the great hall. Allegedly, the Marauders had taken it upon themselves to mess with this clock ever-so-slightly, pushing the time forward by as little as five minutes to allow for them to have a bit of a lay-in. Eventually, however, things got a bit out of hand. The time was altered by hours, meaning that students watched the sunrise at 11 o’clock one morning.

Cassie had found this tale hilarious, though slightly unbelievable. And so, began Sirius’s retellings of the Marauders’ shenanigans, and with it Cassie’s excitement to attend the school one day.

She smiles as she recalls this story, peeking her head into a compartment containing three very small children, the seats around them overflowing with wrappers from various sweets.

“Hello you three,” she smiles, recognising the two girls as the muggleborn students from The Leaky Cauldron the other day.

“-Lo” the little boy grins, his teeth covered in chocolate.

“Don’t eat too much or you’ll spoil your dinner,” she winks, the girls’ eyes widening at this realisation.

“You should change into your robes soon,” she adds. “We’ll be arriving at Hogwarts soon.”

“Welcome to Hogwarts. Now, in a few moments, you will pass through these doors and join your classmates,” Professor Granger smiles, looking down at all the terrified first-years. She notices that Elizabeth and Bea appear to have made a friend on the train.

“But before you can take your seats, you must be sorted into your houses. They are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin,” she continues, taking great pride in delivering the speech that Professor McGonagall had spoken on her first day at the school. It is technically Professor Lupin’s responsibility, but with the full moon approaching at the end of the week, he gladly passed the job off to Hermione today.

“While you’re here, your house will be like your family. Your triumphs will earn you house points. Any rule-breaking, and you will lose points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the house cup.”

She notices a few students looking around nervously, clearly not knowing what to expect. She remembers too well the rumours that had been circulating on her first day.

“The sorting ceremony will begin momentarily,” she explains. “And no, you do not need to fight a dragon,” she adds with a twinkle in her eye, watching a few students visibly relax.

Professor Malfoy sits at the staff table, staring down at the students in front of him. He feels ridiculous, sitting up there. To make matters worse, he had been assigned the same seat that had been his godfather’s, a fact that brings him great discomfort. Taking on the position of Potions Master had already been large shoes to fill, but sitting where Severus Snape had once sat only adds to the imposter syndrome he is currently feeling.

He knows that he’s more than qualified for the job, with a potions mastery from Oxford, and over five years of experience under his belt. The apothecary that he runs with Theo - his business partner and closest friend is a great success—they’d completed multiple contracts with the ministry for potions development over the years. But something about actually having to teach the art of potions somehow seems far more daunting than experimenting with them. It’s one thing to understand the content yourself, but another thing entirely to be able to explain it in a comprehensible way for children.

He takes a moment to inspect each table, the students babbling amongst themselves. To the far left are the lions, then the badgers, the eagles, and finally, on the right, the snakes. He realises how *small* they all look. Professor Malfoy knows he is no longer considered *young*, but it isn’t until he sees all the students sitting in front of him that he realises just how old he really is. The past ten years of his life had passed in a blur, so much so that he hadn’t really felt himself age.

As the doors swing open, he finds himself straightening his posture. Granger marches through the door, a long line of bewildered first-years in tow. Some of them crane their necks to stare at the ceiling and its twinkling stars, while others keep their eyes locked on the table ahead of them.

Draco makes eye contact with Bea, who grins in return.

He turns his attention back towards Granger, watching as she approaches the stool. The sorting hat is perched there, silent and unmoving.

“Your attention please,” she says, the room falling immediately into silence. Draco raises his eyebrows at this, almost surprised by the control she clearly has over the students. But, he supposes, it’s likely not control that she is after. No, each and every student in this room possesses *respect* for Professor Granger. He can’t say he blames them.

“When I call your name, you will come forward. I will place the sorting hat on your head, and you will be sorted into your house.” She smiles, levitating the parchment of names in front of her.

It isn't until Elizabeth's name is called that Draco realises he should be paying attention to the students, and not Granger.

“Slytherin!” the hat yells, sending Elizabeth off towards the snakes. Draco notices Granger looking in his direction, likely trying to catch his reaction to a muggleborn being sorted into Slytherin. He can't understand in the slightest why she hasn't seemed to accept that he isn't his teenage self anymore.

Bea looks around nervously, her mind no doubt running through various scenarios as to if she'll end up with her friend or not. Draco secretly hopes that she does end up in his house.

When Granger reaches the M names, Beatrice steps forward slowly. Once on the stool with the hat firmly on her head, Malfoy holds his breath. After what feels like hours, though it was only thirty seconds, the hat finally makes its decision.

“Gryffindor!” it bellows.

Bea stands with a frown on her face, walking solemnly toward the lions, in the opposite direction of her friend.

Professor Granger takes her seat next to the Potions Master before whispering, “I feel bad for Elizabeth and Bea.”

Malfoy nods, his mouth full of potatoes.

“At least they'll still have lots of classes together,” she rambles on.

Malfoy decides he's quite happy to listen to her ramblings.

Due to the fact that September first had fallen on a Friday this year, the students have an entire weekend to reacquaint themselves with the Castle. Professor Malfoy is thrilled by this, mostly because it means he will have the day completely to himself.

After breakfast, he heads towards the potions storeroom, taking inventory of all the ingredients he will need for his first week of classes. He had quite a bit of fun planning out his lessons for the term, though he would never tell Granger that he did.

He takes his time making his way down his checklist: Infusion of Wormwood, Flobberworm Mucus, Aconite, Asphodel, Dittany ...

There is a knock at the door. He looks up, confused, before walking towards the source of the noise.

“Hello Professor Malfoy,” smiles Cassie Lupin-Black. He takes note of her Slytherin colours, finding them to be surprising. He supposes he should know who his students are, but it's only his second official day, so he cuts himself some slack.

“Hello Miss Lupin-Black,” he replies curtly. “How may I assist you?”

“Well, since *you* haven’t posted anything in the common room, I figured I’d come to ask when you want to meet with the prefects,” she explains.

He nods before adding, “yes, I was going to do that later today.” This is a lie, but he doesn’t want to appear as if he isn’t cut out for his job.

“But, since you’re here,” he continues. “I was thinking this evening, perhaps just after supper?”

“Splendid, and the quidditch team?” she inquires.

“Have them come an hour after supper,” he suggests.

“Double meetings, perfect,” she drawls rather dramatically.

He raises her eyebrow at her remark.

“I’m Head Girl, and Captain of the Quidditch team,” she adds, noticing his confusion.

“Naturally,” he drawls in a similar tone. She is Granger’s goddaughter, after all, he thinks. And Lupin’s daughter. And Black’s daughter. He supposes he shouldn’t be surprised in the slightest.

“Well, see you this evening,” she smiles, turning to leave.

“What position do you play?” he asks suddenly.

“Seeker!” she hollers on her way through the door.

“Of course,” he mutters to himself.

Hermione aimlessly wanders through the castle, quite content to observe all the students walking about the halls. Her lesson plans for the next six weeks are completed, sitting neatly on her desk. All her teaching materials are prepared, labelled, and organised. Extra charms and alchemy textbooks are stacked neatly on her shelves, the desks arranged in small groups.

She had already been to visit Neville in the greenhouses to see if she could help him with anything. He’d thanked her, but assured her there was nothing for her to do. She’d then made the trek up to the divination classroom to visit Luna. She loathes the classroom, finding it stuffy and not conducive to learning whatsoever. But, she loves Luna, so she climbs the ladder anyway.

Luna had been in a very *Luna* mood, to say the least, so Hermione had politely excused herself after a few minutes. She knew Remus would likely be at home with Sirius, where he spends most of his weekends. Especially those so near to the full moon.

And that is how Professor Granger finds herself in the dungeons, nearing the door to the Potions classroom. She’s not sure why she feels the need to check in on Malfoy, but it seems like the right thing to do. The door is propped open ever-so-slightly, allowing for her to peek her head in.

“Hello,” she says, her tone not as confident as it usually is. From Malfoy’s perspective, it looks rather comical the way her head is poking in through the door, her body invisible to him.

“Granger,” Malfoy replies, looking slightly perturbed by her arrival.

“I don't wish to disturb you,” she begins.

“It's no bother,” he replies, though he doesn't meet her glance.

“Just wanted to check in and see how you're doing so far,” she smiles, entering the room.

“Fine, I can assure you I have fulfilled all my responsibilities,” he begins.

“I didn't doubt that,” she clarifies quickly.

“No?”

“No, that certainly wasn't my intention.”

He remains silent, clearly unsure of what to say next. The temperature feels hot, he thinks, especially for the dungeon's standards. He feels as if he can see the air particles between them, perhaps even count how many separate them from one another.

It feels odd for him to be alone with Granger in the potions lab after all this time.

November 02, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

“It's quite simple actually,” she explains. “The Abraxan hair is the secret.”

“It is, in fact, not simple at all Granger,” Draco replies. “Hence why we've been at this for months now with no success.”

“Yes well, solving a problem that has never needed to be solved before tends to be rather difficult,” she adds, crossing her arms. “Honestly, I don't know why he had to brand his followers,” she starts.

“Considering all the other things he did, they are actually one of the more humane aspects of his regime,” he jokes, looking down at the mark on his forearm.

“I suppose you're right,” she agrees as she ties her hair into a knot on the top of her head.

It's late, certainly later than Hermione and Draco should be in the lab, and they both know this. They keep their conversation at almost a whisper.

“What led me to restart my thinking process was the realisation that Voldemort was an arrogant man,” she begins, Draco cringing at the use of his name.

“He never thought that his followers would need, nor want, to remove the dark mark,” she continues. Draco follows her train of thought, realising where it's headed.

“So, logically, he never would have planned for there to be any kind of removal process.”

Draco nods.

“So I had to get creative, and attempt to understand what the dark mark is, *really* .”

She lights the fire under the cauldron. “Originally, I had thought it to be similar to a muggle tattoo, based on the procedure you explained to me about how they were imprinted on you.”

He shivers at the reminder. As a general rule of thumb, Draco tries not to think of such things, preferring instead to just skip over any memories from those three years of his life.

“But I have a theory that the mark isn’t just on your skin,” she continues, beginning to add the first ingredient, Horklump juice, into the cauldron.

“It’s in your blood,” she says, looking up at him and finally meeting his eyes.

September 02, 2006, The Potions Classroom, Hogwarts

“Well, I’m doing great Granger, thanks for checking in,” he smirks, effectively dismissing her.

“Are you excited for your first class?” she asks, clearly not picking up on his attempt to politely excuse himself

“As excited as one can be, I suppose.”

“Well, let me know if you need anything,” she smiles.

Draco finds this both generous and disturbing at the same time. He can tell that Granger actually means it and that her offer is genuine. However, it’s disturbing to him because usually when someone offers their help they want something in return, and Draco has no idea what he has to offer Granger that she could possibly want.

“I’m just being friendly Malfoy. There’s no ulterior motive here,” she clarifies with a chuckle, clearly having noticed his brain dissecting the encounter.

“Alright, well, I’ll let you know,” he replies simply.

She turns to leave before he suddenly says her last name, causing her to turn to face him once more.

She tilts her head, suggesting he continue his thought.

“What should I cover with the prefects and quidditch team?” he asks, clearly embarrassed by the question.

“Whatever you deem important, you’re their head of Slytherin house,” she smiles. Then, noticing his disappointment in her response, she adds, “though I do know that Neville often reviews representing Gryffindor’s values, the expectations of their roles, and procedures for reporting problems.”

“Okay, yes,” he nods.

“As for Quidditch, I haven’t a clue,” she begins. “Maybe something about being a good sport?” she suggests.

Malfoy laughs at this. “Okay, Granger got it.”

She nods and walks out the door.

He catches the lingering smell of strawberries and honey, which reminds him to order Pearl Dust for his lesson on the brewing process of Amortentia for his NEWT classes next week.

The meeting with the Slytherin prefects is a success. Draco reiterates Slytherin's values and reminds them that they are to make sure that all the students in their house feel welcome. Cassie leads the rest of the meeting, meaning that Malfoy is able to sit back and take on the responsibility of offering nods of approval.

With the prefects gone, and the quidditch team yet to arrive, Cassie takes it upon herself to stare at Professor Malfoy. She narrows her eyes and tilts her head from side to side as if trying to see through him.

Then, when he decides to stare back at her and beat her at whatever game she's trying to play, she nods her head in approval, sitting back in her chair as she mindlessly braids her hair.

He can already tell that Cassie Lupin-Black will be a pain in his arse. Though, luckily he doesn't teach the seventh-year NEWT class until Friday. Bewildered by the interaction, Draco almost fails to realise that the quidditch team has arrived: six girls and one boy.

"Hello," he begins, standing and walking around his desk. He perches on the edge in a half-seated position, his arms crossed.

After brief introductions, and more than a few giggles from the girls, he dismisses them. As a whole, he finds these kinds of meetings to be rather pointless for all the parties involved. It's that very reason he never could have become a politician like his father had wanted him to—so many pointless meetings.

He hears one girl mutter the words "*proper fit*" on the way out, causing him to roll his eyes. He realises how much easier it was to deal with teenagers when he was one. Now? Not so much.

Chapter End Notes

I realize that for Oliver Wood's son to be 11 in 2006, he would have been born in 1995 (Before The Battle of Hogwarts). This is obviously not canon, but I took some creative liberty with this. It's important to note that all of the children at Hogwarts during this time would have been alive during Voldemort's overtaking of the ministry and the Battle of Hogwarts.

Ad Astra per Aspera

Chapter Notes

Wolfstar content has arrived! As I said, this is first and foremost a Dramione fic, but with Wolfstar as a major side-pairing. I couldn't resist including my two favourite ships in one fic + I just want to give Wolfstar a happy ending, SUE ME.

Again, I assume that All The Young Dudes by MsKingBean89 (up until a certain point) is canon for the sake of this story. It is her version of Remus and Sirius that I will be using.

As always, thank you to everyone who's leaving kudos & comments - they fuel my fire to write :)

Follow @embersofapril on TikTok, Twitter & Insta for updates on chapters!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sirius Black separates his existence into four distinct lifetimes. First, he has his childhood. This life was one of both joy and sorrow, laughter and pain. His days as a carefree child were a constant contradiction between light and dark.

His childhood began in the darkness, under his mother's disapproving stare and at the tip of her wand. But the day he stepped foot onto the Hogwarts Express, he decided he much preferred the light. The day he met James Potter and Remus Lupin in that compartment, Sirius knew he would never be like his parents, for he had too much love in his heart. He knew from that day forth that he would always be willing to look for what little light there is in this world.

The end of his childhood ended in darkness once more. Yes, he was technically twenty-two when he was locked away, but his spirit had still very much been that of a child. But the day that his best friend was killed because of his misjudgement, was the day he was a child no longer. He hadn't killed his best friend—his brother, but in Sirius's opinion, he may as well have.

The following twelve years in Azkaban were their own lifetime entirely, one filled with self-hatred and fear. Every night when he would close his eyes he would picture James's smile, the way his eyes would crinkle with laughter behind his round glasses. He would picture Lily staring down at her son with a mother's love that he himself had never experienced. He would curse himself for fating young Harry to a life far less than he deserved, one void of the love his parents were so willing to provide.

But most of all, at night as he lay in the cold darkness, he missed his Moony.

The day he saw Peter Pettigrew in the Daily Prophet that was tucked under the arm of Cornelius Fudge is when his next lifetime began, one of vengeance. Sirius decided he would not rest until Voldemort was reduced to ashes. From the day he escaped Azkaban, swimming across those ominous waters until the Battle of Hogwarts, Sirius was a shell of the man he once had been. Gone was the twinkle in his eyes, his naive optimism, and his love for this life. In fact, Sirius didn't start

healing the hole in his heart until the day he saw Tom Riddle, the man responsible for ruining the lives of so many, evaporate seemingly into thin air.

He remembers staring at the spot where he'd been, wondering how on earth one single person could cause such havoc. But seeing him disappear unlocked something within Sirius's soul, a box that had been tucked away and long forgotten. He'd broken down on all fours and sobbed, gasping for air. Because Sirius realised for the first time in a long time, that he would finally have a fair chance at life once more.

Though they'd reconnected shortly after his return from Azkaban, Sirius's relationship with Remus was not what it had once been. For those five years before Voldemort was killed, it was as if they were clinging onto one another for dear life, both taking turns acting as the current carrying them forwards. There were days when Moony wouldn't get out of bed, tired of a life filled with loss. Days like these would tear Sirius's heart in two.

Sirius felt an immense amount of guilt for leaving him behind. Because while Sirius had been locked away, he at least possessed the knowledge that it had not been his betrayal that had resulted in the death of their closest friends. Remus had been forced to continue on with the belief that the man he loved had betrayed those they'd sworn to protect.

Remus, of course, did not hold Sirius's absence against him. And, on the days when Sirius became filled with rage, swearing and breaking anything that happened to be in his path, Remus remained understanding, empathetic even. He knew that everyone experiences their emotions differently, and while Remus would turn inwards and introspective, Sirius would lash out, allowing them to take control of him until they swallowed him whole.

But the day after Voldemort finally ceased to exist. For good this time, Remus and Sirius looked at one another and saw what was behind their hurt, their pain, and found that there was still much love to be had.

A few short days after the battle of Hogwarts had been won, Sirius had gotten down on one knee in front of Remus and asked him to marry him, a question he'd been planning to ask since he was sixteen years old. The ring was a simple one, made of steel, and not silver. On the inside was the inscription *Ad Astra per Aspera*.

Through adversity to the stars.

Sirius was both thankful for his second chance at life, yet remorseful for all the years they'd lost. He'd been determined to make up for all that time ever since.

It had been very late one night and a few glasses of Ogden's finest had been consumed when Sirius brought up the idea he'd been pondering for many weeks.

"You'd be such a good dad Moony," he'd smiled, his eyes slightly glazed over from the liquor.

"You would be too," Remus had laughed in return. "I mean it," he'd added once he'd noticed Sirius's questioning stare.

Truth be told, Sirius had never really envisioned himself as a parent. He can recall how bewildered he'd been when James had become a father, realising that they were apparently the age where they could become parents. The idea of being responsible for another human being frightened him.

In the years that followed, there were no thoughts of ever perhaps having children of his own, convinced that he was to rot on that godforsaken island for the rest of time.

Then, even after his escape, he had never envisioned bringing a child into a world where Voldemort still reigned, not wanting to submit any child to the suffering that would surely occur if he was to die.

But even as he bravely brought this topic forward, he still had his reservations. He had a fear that the minute a child was deemed as *his* that he would somehow morph into his father, or even worse, his mother.

He wasn't sure if he could be a parent like Fleamont or Euphemia. He worried that his heart was filled with the darkness he had surely inherited from The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black.

His boggart had been Moony, laying lifeless on the ground for as long as he could remember. But one day, it shifted. It now included a small child, cowering in fear behind him, Sirius towering over them with his wand pointed in the child's direction.

But, simultaneously, Sirius wanted Remus to have the opportunity to be a father. And so, he too would become one, because he wasn't leaving Moony to do anything alone ever again.

He had come to terms with the fact that all humans have both light and dark inside of us, and what really matters is the part we choose to act on.

"We should adopt a child," he suggests quickly, allowing the words to spill out of his mouth before he had the chance to stop himself.

"Okay," Remus replies simply, without giving himself a single second to think it over. "We should buy a proper home first," he laughs, looking at the messy flat they were currently inhabiting.

"I'll buy one tomorrow," yawns Sirius.

Remus laughs, "Of course you will."

Their cottage in Hogsmede represented a fresh start for the two of them. A chance to grow and evolve as one.

"Pads, why do I need to be blindfolded?" asks Remus for the third time.

"What? You don't like it?" Sirius gasps in return. Though he can't see him, Remus can tell that he's wiggling his eyebrows.

"Get this off of me. I'll see it soon anyway," groans Remus.

"Taa-Daa!" exclaims Sirius, removing the blindfold with a certain level of flare only he seemed to be able to accomplish.

Remus grins, staring at the small little cottage in front of him. He can see the castle off in the distance, which only makes him love their home even more. Hogwarts was more than a school to both him and Sirius. It was one of the few places that felt like *home* to the pair.

They were married in the garden of their new home a few days after the end of Hogwarts' term. Harry had stood by Sirius's side as his best man, though they both knew that he was taking on the role on behalf of both himself and his father.

"Now, we have many children currently staying with us," the Matron had explained. Remus was extremely uncomfortable being in the orphanage. It reminded him of St Edmunds far too much.

But this establishment was created specifically for orphans of the war, and his heart ached to see how many children were there—he wanted to adopt them all.

"Is there a certain age you were hoping for?" she'd asked.

"Not really," Remus had replied, realising that they'd just decided to adopt a child, and hadn't really discussed what kind of child. Though Remus didn't really feel like it was *right* to plan out the child you wanted.

"Well, we can go meet some of the younger children just through here."

They were sitting on the floor playing with a large group of children between the ages of two and four. Sirius was having the time of his life, driving the small motorbike across the floor, making the sound effects as the children grinned in his direction.

"Matron!" she'd screamed as she entered the room, tears streaming down her face.

"My dear, what is wrong?" the matron had asked.

"They tripped me and I fell and scraped my knee," the girl had sobbed.

The matron had returned a few moments later, apologising profusely.

"The other children, they take their anger out on her, the poor girl," she had exclaimed. "To them, she represents the reason their parents are no longer with us."

Sirius and Remus had shared a knowing look before deciding right then and there that this girl was the one that they were meant to adopt.

Cassie Lupin-Black takes great pride in being exceptional. Ever since she was adopted, and the bleak life she had been assigned had been transformed before her very eyes, she has been determined not to waste it.

She has something to prove, to herself, to her fathers, and to the world. And while she is already Head Girl, the top of her class, and quidditch captain, she still yearns for *more*.

When she'd overheard Hermione discussing the championship that Hogwarts was to host, it had felt like fate. *This* is what she'd been searching for.

She is practically counting down the days until the tournament is announced to the students. She'd been harbouring the existence of the championship, not breathing a word of it to even her closest friends.

She'd started spending her evenings in the library, reading up on the history of the competition, or rather its predecessor, *The Triwizard Tournament*. She knows that there are likely to be many differences, but she still feels the need to do *something* to prepare.

From what she could find, selected champions would compete in three tasks that were designed to test their magical ability, intelligence, and courage. She of course knew that Harry, her Godfather, had partaken during his fourth year, but when she'd written to him weeks ago his reply had left much to be desired.

Cassie,

Hermione has asked me to not encourage you to enter the championship. I don't know what she considers to be encouraging, but I don't want to take any chances.

Also, that whole tournament was a blur to me. I hardly remember any of it apart from nearly being burned to death by a dragon, nearly drowning in the black lake, and nearly being killed by Voldemort.

Do with that what you will.

Stay out of trouble.

Or don't. I know you have the map.

Harry

P.S. James, Frederick and Lily send their love.

She'd found newspaper clippings from the Prophet that reported on the tournament, but found it to be a rather abysmal display of journalism, mostly focusing on Harry's past and Hermione's dating life.

She was, however, excited to discover that her Godmother had seemed to have bagged a quidditch champion at some point. She'd have to bring that up with her at dinner on Sunday.

Professor Malfoy is taking his well-deserved Wednesday prep period in the Staff room when Professor Granger enters in a flurry.

"I'm going to lose my mind!" she exclaims, clearly not having noticed his presence. She's stomping around in a huff, and Draco has to hold back a laugh upon witnessing the act.

She turns suddenly, stopping dead in her tracks when she notices him.

"Oh, Malfoy! Hello!" she exclaims, her voice cheery, though forced.

"Don't stop your rampage on my account, Granger," he smirks before turning back to the Daily Prophet spread out in front of him.

"Why are you reading that junk?" she asks, peering at the moving photographs on the front page.

"Why are you going to *lose your mind*?" he retorts.

She purses her lips and furrows her brow.

“If you must know, it’s Jocelyne Williams,” she says as if this answers his question. He raises his eyebrow in her direction.

“She’s the charms professor at Ilvermorny,” she adds.

“Ah, is this some kind of Charms Professor rivalry?” he jests, clearly not taking the conversation seriously.

“She’s, she’s a ...” Hermione begins, allowing her words to trail off, her hair sparking in the way it does when she’s particularly flustered.

“A *what* Granger?” Draco asks, bemused.

“A toad.”

This causes Draco to actually burst out laughing, a sensation that isn’t very frequent for him. “Is that the best insult you can come up with Granger?”

“Well that’s what she is,” she explains, crossing her arms in front of her.

As previously mentioned, Professor Williams and Professor Granger are, by Hermione’s definition, arch-nemeses. Specifically, academic arch-nemeses.

Hermione had completed a second mastery after the completion of her first at Oxford, this one at Harvard. She had always dreamed of visiting America, the differences in the magical histories intriguing enough for her to make the trip across the Atlantic.

However, Hermione had never met anyone that really challenged her academically until she met Jocelyne. It was as if she had finally found her equal, but instead of it being the wondrous experience she’d always hoped for, it had made her furious.

Initially, she hadn’t been sure what it was about Jocelyne that irked her so. She was indeed irritating, and incredibly stubborn, but Hermione knew those qualities alone were not what made her loathe Jocelyne in the way she does.

No, it wasn’t until she’d made some time for some conscious introspection that she realised that this disdain was likely due to the fact that looking at Jocelyne was like looking in a mirror.

Her entire self-image had been based on the fact that she was regularly deemed as exceptional, a cut above the rest, the Brightest Witch of Her Age. However, for all intents and purposes, she and Jocelyne were the same person, and this scared Hermione.

But she was determined to achieve that second mastery, even if some days the sole reason was that Jocelyne would only have completed one.

Hermione loved Harvard’s campus and her small flat on Cambridge Street. But most of all, she loved getting away from the UK, even just for a bit.

She loved the UK, of course, but she had longed for something *new*. She had felt stagnant—like she was treading water without ever moving forward. Harry and Ginny had gotten married and started a family of their own, and Ron had moved in with Dean. She still attended dinner at the Burrow with the Weasleys every week, but as time wore on, she started to feel like an outsider looking in, rather than a part of the family.

She had initially felt guilty for leaving so soon after the triplets had been born. But at the recommendation of someone whose opinion she quite valued, she had eventually decided that she needed to do something for *her* for once.

The Weasley genes had reigned supreme when Ginny had become pregnant, three healthy children arriving early one morning in June. The birth of James Rubeus, Frederick Sirius, and Lily Minerva Potter had been national news, The Chosen One and Saviour of the Wizarding world, a father.

Hermione had been, of course, thrilled for her two friends. Truthfully, she believed there were no two people better suited for one another than Ginevra Weasley and Harry Potter. But at the same time, it had made her feel slightly *jealous*, though she would never admit to this.

It wasn't that she was jealous of the children, because she wasn't even sure if she ever wanted to have children of her own. It also wasn't that she was jealous of their marriage, she was quite happy being by herself. And this remained true, for a little while at least.

No, her jealousy was rooted in the fact that her friends all seemed to be moving on to the next stage of their lives, wherever that may be for them. Their paths had been cleared, the brambles trimmed, and flowers planted.

Hermione's path that had once appeared clear had ended up being a mirage of sorts. It was as if her desire for her path to be clear had been so wholehearted that she had convinced herself it was. The reflection she saw was the one she desired, rather than the truth.

And the truth is actually quite simple: Hermione knew how to support everyone but herself. By the end of the war, she hadn't had a clue who she actually was or what her path may be.

Ever since the day she had met Harry and Ron on the train, Hermione had felt as if she was a part of something. She'd had a role determined for her quite early on: *The Brightest Witch of Her Age*, the brains of the golden trio, books and cleverness.

Hermione had been speaking earnestly when she'd urged Harry that there were things far more important, but she didn't know how to be anything else. Who was she, if not a product of the books she read and the knowledge she sought?

As the dust settled, and Hogwarts was rebuilt, Hermione found it very difficult to follow suit. Harry and Ron had moved on as if the past eight years of their lives had never occurred, quite happy to forget it and leave it all behind.

So even after the completion of her first Mastery, a feat many are not able to reach, Hermione still hadn't wanted to enter *the real world*, as Ron calls it. She felt as if she still had so much to learn both about magic—and herself. But truthfully, leaving her sanctuary of knowledge and the pursuit of it frightened her more than anything else.

Sure, she'd been offered a plethora of jobs at the Ministry, but none of them interested her. In fact, the thought of being shackled to a cubicle for the rest of her existence was the last thing she

desired.

It had been Malfoy, actually, who had suggested that she apply to become a Professor at Hogwarts.

May 24, 2001, Grandpont Nature Park, Oxford

“Granger, the Ministry will roll over and offer to perform tricks if it means you’ll take on a position,” he laughs, taking another swig of elf wine.

She remains incredibly silent, something that has always frightened Draco. He likes her incessant chatter, the way her mind never seems to stop, finding it calming, almost soothing.

“Can I tell you a secret?” she asks.

He stares in her direction, though his eyes are filled to the brim with kindness, rather than judgement, something Hermione had struggled to distinguish at first.

Hermione feels safe when she’s in his presence, especially on nights like this where it’s only them and the stars.

“I don’t ever want to work for the ministry,” she whispers.

“Me neither,” he whispers back, quickly realising that this is the first time he’s ever admitted to this out loud.

She turns to face him, shifting the blanket underneath them ever so slightly.

“But I don’t know what else there is to do,” she begins before taking a deep breath.

“Can I tell you my deepest, darkest secret?”

“If you’re going to confess your love to me Granger-” he begins, but she cuts him off.

“I’m not joking right now, Malfoy.”

Draco finds that this sends a slight sting through his heart, but he blames it on the elf wine.

“Okay, yes, divulge all your secrets to me, oh Golden Girl,” he replies, hoisting the bottle into the air with a tone of sarcasm only he seems to wield so effectively.

She stares up at the sky, her eyes tracking from one constellation to the next. She finds peace when she locates the one she’d been looking for.

“Sometimes I dream of just leaving the wizarding world behind, and becoming a muggle once more,” she whispers, her voice so quiet that it takes Draco a moment to parse the sounds together and decipher their meaning.

“Really?” he asks.

“I think I have accomplished all I was meant to,” she adds.

“Granger, that is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard,” he replies simply. At that moment, he thinks that her opinion on the matter is one of the worst takes he’s ever heard. “And here I was thinking you’re supposedly the Brightest Witch of our Age, or whatever the prophet is calling you these days.”

“It’s hard Malfoy, knowing that you peaked at age eighteen,” she explains.

“You seem to think that a peak is merely a stop on your journey, rather than the location you’re meant to remain.”

She stares at him, her mind evidently pondering the words he had spoken.

“You’ve earned your place at the top Granger. Now all that’s expected of you is to enjoy it.”

“You know I can’t just do nothing-” she begins, but he cuts her off.

“I don’t mean to suggest that you sit back and do nothing, Granger, I know you better than that.”

A smile tugs at her lips.

“I mean that now you can do absolutely whatever *you* want. You mustn’t consider what other people expect you to do.”

She nods slowly, understanding.

“If you could do anything in the world, Granger, what would it be?”

“I have no idea, honestly.”

“Do you want my opinion?” he asks.

“I thought I wasn’t supposed to consider the opinions of others,” she jests.

“My opinion is another matter entirely, thank you very much,” he smirks, but Hermione knows it’s one of playfulness, one she rather enjoys being on the receiving end of.

“Okay Malfoy, what would you have me do?” she asks.

“I always figured you’d return to Hogwarts, to teach.”

Malfoy had indeed thought such a thing for quite a few years now. The first time he’d thought it had probably been in their fourth year when he’d noticed her essentially teaching Potter three years’ worth of curriculum every night in preparation for the Triwizard Tournament. Then, again in their eighth year, when she’d taken the time to teach him to conjure a Patronus.

“Really?” she asks, her tone one of surprise.

“Have you honestly never considered it?”

“I can’t say I have.”

Hermione hadn’t given much thought to her future at all, for that matter. Her entire existence up until very recently had been about keeping Harry alive, taking each day one at a time. Now that her

every waking breath wasn't filled with a feeling of imminent danger, she realised she had no idea what was to come next.

She allows her mind to wander, picturing herself in front of a class of young children, perhaps explaining Gamp's Law of Elemental Transfiguration. She pictures herself at the staff table and glancing at the seat next to her, Malfoy smiling back.

She catches herself, pulling her train of thought to a halt. *Malfoy?*

"You would be a brilliant teacher too," she adds suddenly.

"Me?" he laughs. "Granger, can you imagine me being in charge of small children?"

"Yes, actually, I can."

Now it's Draco's turn to ponder this possibility. He had plans to open an apothecary with Theo in a few months' time. He'd already acquired the storefront in Diagon Alley and begun to outsource the harder-to-come-by ingredients. But truthfully, teaching at Hogwarts had never been a possibility he'd considered. He doubted McGonagall would even hire him.

"Maybe someday, Granger," he replies simply.

"Yeah, maybe someday."

Chapter End Notes

St Edmunds is a reference to All The Young Dudes by MsKingBean89.

We're slowly getting some more context for Draco and Hermione's history, and I will continue to reveal things as they become relevant. But, I promise we will eventually get the full story!!

Birthday Cupcakes

Chapter Notes

Happy Birthday, Professor Granger!! In a perfect world I would have been at this point 11 days ago but alas.

Hope you all enjoy this chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As the sun rises on the nineteenth of September, Hermione can't help but want to crawl back into bed. Hermione has always loathed her birthday, and this year is no exception.

There's a specific sort of disappointment that she feels each year as the day arrives, one that she can't quite put into words. She knows she has plenty to be thankful for, and various accomplishments to reflect on, but it's never those things causing the feeling of numbness that takes over her body.

It's also not that she dreads the future. She's certain there are many things to look forward to. No, Hermione has never really understood why she dreads the day as much as she does. But if she was to guess, she would presume that it is because of the way the day stands out from the rest.

In her mind, the day is much more complicated than it appears. September 19th represents *her* and her relationships with all the people in her life. And for whatever reason, Hermione always feels slightly let down.

She's always been the person who remembers other people's birthdays and is sure to wish them well, or even purchase them a small gift. Every year for Harry's birthday, she would have a single vanilla cupcake ready for him at breakfast, because she knows they're his favourite. He'd confided in her once when they were much younger, about how the Dursleys had treated his birthday—she'd vowed to never let the day go forgotten ever again.

For Ron's birthday, it was slightly different, because the Weasleys always made a big deal out of birthdays. Molly would send Errol with sweets, and all of his siblings would gather around them at the Gryffindor table to sing whatever god-awful song Fred and George had put together that year. There wasn't as much pressure for her to make a big deal out of his day, but she still did. Even during their Horcrux hunt, Hermione had made sure to locate a small cake from a bakery in a muggle town for Ron's birthday.

On the mornings of Lavender and Parvarti's birthdays, Hermione would conjure balloons to leave around their bed, though they never thanked her for it. She wonders if they ever even realised it was her that did it. When it came to Hermione's, she never so much as received a Happy Birthday from the two, let alone balloons.

All this to say, Hermione is someone who ensures that everyone feels remembered on their birthday, most likely because no one ever seemed to remember hers.

She knows that it's close to the beginning of term and that her friends are probably just preoccupied with staying on top of their coursework, but it still stings.

Over time, she'd learned to not expect much. Every year on the evening of September 18th, she would promise herself that she would treat the following day like any other. It was nothing to celebrate, after all.

Hermione would remind herself every year that birthdays are actually rather silly, and pointless. She would smile if Harry or Ron remembered, though it was usually late in the evening when they would wish her Happy Birthday.

Most years, a letter from her parents would not arrive until weeks after. But again, she couldn't blame them. They had been terribly confused by the wizarding post.

Hermione often spent her day with a small bubble of hope in her chest, and every year, without fail, this bubble would burst as she would shut the drapes on her four-poster bed later that evening. She would always be upset with herself for *feeling upse t*, but repeated the cycle each and every year.

But one year, Hermione's birthday took a turn. Somebody remembered.

September 19th, 1995, The Hogwarts Library

Hermione walks towards her table in the library, the one tucked in the back by the window. She rather enjoys her Tuesdays this term, because she has the entire morning to herself.

Breakfast had gone by without a single mutter of Happy Birthday, exactly as she had expected. She feels ridiculous, for even thinking about such a thing, let alone allowing it to dampen her mood.

She knows that the best way to cheer herself up is with a nice three-and-a-half-hour study session in the library. She weaves through the shelves, taking a moment to breathe in deeply to appreciate her favourite smell: books.

She turns the last corner, arriving in the Alchemy section before coming to a sudden halt. Any other student in the library surely would have been shocked by how quickly she had stopped, perhaps wondering if she'd seen something frightening, but there were no other students around at this time. Or so it seemed.

There, on her table, is a cupcake with a single candle already lit. She rushes forward, taking note of the fact that it's strawberry shortcake, her absolute favourite.

She grins, glancing around to see if she can find the person who left it for her. She peeks around the nearby shelves, almost hoping that Harry or Ron would jump out at her at any moment. But she finds no one.

She returns to the table and takes her time getting herself situated before staring at the cupcake. She stares at it for so long that the wax from the candle slowly starts to drip onto the pink icing below.

Hermione tries to commit this moment to memory, never wanting to forget the day that someone, though she doesn't know who, remembered her day.

She decides she's taken long enough to appreciate the moment and peels the wrapper off. She takes a large bite, a tiny dollop of icing remaining on her nose.

She smiles to herself as she finishes it, her Transfiguration essay forgotten for the time being.

A few shelves over is a boy, currently under a Disillusionment Charm. He grins as he watches her eat the cupcake, quite happy that he was the one to remember, though he never plans to tell her it was him.

September 19th, 1996, The Hogwarts Library

Hermione walks into the library after a quick escape from that morning's Ancient Runes lecture. It had been an exceptionally fascinating one, to say the least. Professor Babbling had gone off on a tangent about Elder Futhark, the oldest version of the Runic alphabet. Hermione had been furiously taking notes, her hand now cramped from clutching her quill.

The lecture had actually reminded her of her desire to find some kind of spell to help her take notes, perhaps one that is able to transfer her thoughts onto the page in front of her. Maybe that is what she would focus on today.

As she rounds the final shelf before arriving at her table, she comes to a halt in the same fashion that she had the year prior. There was another cupcake on her table.

It's the same as the year prior, and as she stares in its direction, she realises that she'd nearly forgotten about its mysterious appearance. To be fair, she did have quite a hectic past year.

She grins as she continues towards the table, a slight spring in her step. She devours it this time, without a moment to stare at it. She knows she has icing on her face, and she probably looks ridiculous, but she doesn't care.

Once again, a boy sits a few shelves over, quite out of breath from his run to the library from Ancient Runes. But, the boy who sits disillusioned this year is not the same boy he had been the year prior. He'd been forced to grow up rather quickly since then.

September 19th, 1997, The Tent

Hermione wakes early that morning, making her way out of the tent to relieve Harry from his watch duty.

"Morning," she smiles.

"Morning," he yawns, making no moves to get up.

Hermione can't help but wonder if he'll remember what today is. She already decided not to be upset if he doesn't. It's easy to lose track of which day it is with their current living situation.

"Go get some sleep, I'll stay out here. I need to refresh the enchantments anyway."

He stands and heads inside without complaint.

Hermione sits beneath a large oak tree, a knitted blanket draped over her legs as she flips through the pages of *The Beedle and The Bard*. It's become a comforting motion for her, flipping through the pages, as if they'll somehow tell her where all the Horcruxes are hidden.

Though, she supposes, they all have their *thing* right now: Harry, his snitch, Ron, his radio.

She wonders where the person who leaves her cupcakes is this year. She hopes they're doing well and are safe, wherever they are.

September 19th, 1998, The Hogwarts Library

As Hermione enters the library, she can't help but realise how much everything has changed. Obviously, she knew that things would both be different, and feel different upon her return to Hogwarts. But something about this day in particular really makes her stop and think.

Truthfully, she feels as if she's aged at least ten years since her last birthday spent in this library, even though it had only been two.

She remembers thinking that she felt so old when she'd turned seventeen, finally of age and whatnot. But now she's realising that back then, she'd still been very much a child.

Now, she knows for certain that she is an adult. Since her arrival two weeks prior, when she walks through the castle and sees the younger students running about, she can't help but stare. She tries to picture her younger self who had walked through these same corridors, the girl who had been so full of naive optimism, and finds she can't remember her at all. It makes her yearn for the simplicity of childhood. The way the world had seemed ripe with possibilities.

She makes the familiar trip to the back of the library and notices that there is once again a cupcake on her table.

She stares at it, her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Of all the things that had changed, how was it possible that this is the one thing that remained unchanged? She feels as if she's undeserving for some reason, almost unworthy of such a gift, or someone remembering. It's as if, after all these years, her expectations had been lowered to such an extent that even something this simple makes her feel guilty.

These days, guilt is a constant, pervasive feeling for Hermione. Every time the Prophet publishes an article about her, she feels guilty. Every time someone stops her in Diagon Alley to thank her, she feels guilty. To these people, she is a key member of the Golden trio, saviours of the Wizarding World. But truthfully, Hermione had just been trying to stay alive for the past year. She doesn't feel deserving of their praise.

She approaches the cupcake hesitantly, tears starting to emerge from her eyes. Her vision becomes blurry as she stares down at the pink icing. She feels ridiculous crying, but something about the cupcake's appearance made her feel all the emotions she'd been trying to stifle as of late.

As she wipes her tears and takes a bite, she notices a movement out of the corner of her eye. She turns towards the source, finding nothing. She decides she'd imagined it. She is still rather jumpy after the war.

The boy leaves the library in a hurry, awfully confused as to why his cupcake had made her cry.

September 19th, 2006, Professor Granger's Office

Hermione has approximately six minutes to sit in her office before her next class. Her Tuesdays are jammed packed with no prep period this term, and she can't say that it isn't getting to her.

Sometimes she just needs to sit in silence for a moment without the sounds of children asking her question after question. She loves them all, she really does. She knows that this is surely karma catching up with her, for how annoying she'd been as a child, but today, their incessant balling is getting to her more than usual.

She fumbles with the stack of parchment she's holding, going to place it on her desk when she notices something. A cupcake.

She frowns. She hadn't seen one of these in eight years and had almost forgotten about them entirely. *Almost*.

Her brain takes off, attempting to decipher what the appearance of the pink baked good could mean. At first, she wonders if it's the elves. Maybe they'd finally forgiven her for her knitting. But no, that doesn't make sense.

That leaves only three options for who the mysterious person could be: Luna, Neville, or ... Malfoy.

She can't decide if she wants it to be him or not. She decides to not get her hopes up. She knows that it's probably Luna.

"Luna!" she exclaims as she walks into the staff room.

"Oh, Hello Hermione," the witch smiles.

"I have a question for you," Hermione begins.

"Oh, how interesting," replies Luna with a pensive look that greatly confuses Hermione.

"Did you leave me a cupcake in my office this morning?"

"No, but was it purple?" the blonde witch asks.

"Er, no?"

"How curious," Luna replies, looking off into the distance.

"Neville!" she says a little louder than necessary as she weaves through the various plants towards the back of the greenhouse.

"Oh, hey Hermione!" he replies with a grin.

Hermione can't help but allow her eyes to linger on her friend. He had certainly gotten rather attractive over the years. She'd once considered if she could ever see herself with him, but decided

he was far too much like a brother to her. There is also the fact that he is obviously terribly in love with Luna.

“Did you leave a cupcake in my office this morning?” she asks, cutting right to the chase.

“Er, no,” he begins, looking uncomfortable. “Is it your birthday? I’m so sorry that I forgot!”

“Oh, don’t worry about that Neville,” she smiles. “Sirius wanted me to invite you to dinner on Friday. Did you want to come?”

“Of course, do you know if he’s making Shepherd’s Pie?” he asks. The first time Neville had joined her for dinner at Sirius and Remus’s cottage, Sirius had served his now famous Shepherd’s Pie. Neville hasn’t shut up about it ever since.

Sirius, much to Neville’s disappointment, had made maple-glazed cedar plank salmon for dinner. It was Hermione’s favourite of all the dishes that Sirius had perfected over the years. Ever since they’d adopted Cassie, Sirius had been determined to become a good cook. In Hermione’s opinion, he’d far surpassed good, and was in the territory of fantastic.

He’d also learned to knit from Molly Weasley, and now took it upon himself to knit everyone, and Moony especially, new sweaters, scarves, and hats for every occasion. For this reason, Hermione is anything but surprised when she opens a new navy blue sweater as Sirius drunkenly sings Happy Birthday for the fourth time that evening.

She looks around the table and smiles at everyone present. Harry and Ginny sit to her left, their three small children drifting to sleep on the sofa behind them. Neville is lounging in his chair, downing his fourth glass of Ogden’s finest of the evening. Sirius and Remus sway from side to side as they sing, Cassie laughing as she stares lovingly at her fathers.

Hermione doesn’t think she’d ever been as happy as she is at that very moment.

It’s not until Hermione is walking up the steps to the castle that she realises she’s had far too much to drink. This is usually the case when she dines at the Cottage, the drinks going down far too easily, her glass never reaching empty.

Neville had tripped and stumbled a few times on the walk over, causing Hermione to fall into a fit of laughter. Now, as they walk past the Great Hall, she prays there aren’t any students out of bed to witness them in such a state.

“Go ahead Neville, I just need to check something,” she smiles.

“Night -Mione,” he slurs.

Hermione can feel the temperature drop the moment she descends the stairs into the dungeons. She’d been avoiding Malfoy all week, too scared to ask him if he was the person to leave the mysterious baked good on her desk. She can’t say that she hadn’t secretly been hoping that it was him for quite a few years now, though she’d never let this train of thought progress to the point of contemplation—she didn’t want to get her hopes up.

She makes her way towards the potions classroom and knocks purposefully on the door, only then realising that she was about to finally solve a mystery she'd been trying to make sense of for over ten years.

She hears shuffling on the other side of the door and straightens her posture, feeling emboldened by the liquid courage currently coursing through her veins. She wonders how she knew he would be in the classroom and not his chambers. Though she supposes after collaborating with him for two years, she had grown rather familiar with his brewing habits.

The door swings open as if in slow-motion.

"Granger?" she hears. His voice sounds like honey, she thinks.

"Malfoy," she replies simply, staring at him. Any courage she'd had seemed to have disappeared the minute he opened the door.

He's wearing casual clothes, ones he rarely lets anyone see. Hermione always likes him in these best, finding they allow for him to appear much less harsh than he usually chooses to. A white t-shirt clings to his arms, simple black trousers fitting loosely around his waist.

"And how may I be of assistance at this hour, Granger?" he asks, removing his glasses to rub his eyes.

"I have a question for you," she replies simply, staring at him.

Draco grows rather uncomfortable at this. As a rule of thumb, he doesn't like not knowing what to expect from a situation, especially when it involves Granger.

"And what might that be?"

"Can I come in?" she asks suddenly.

He stares at her for a moment before asking, "is that your question?"

"No."

He opens the door further and gestures for her to enter.

She enters the space timidly, taking in her surroundings. Something about the potions classroom has always helped Hermione feel at ease. She loves the art of brewing, the way one is able to concentrate wholeheartedly on the task. She likes how methodological it is, how you flow from one step to the next, adding ingredients at precisely the right moment.

She's always loved how rewarding the art of potions is. She'd first felt the rush of accomplishment when she'd successfully brewed Polyjuice potion in her second year, a potion many NEWT students struggle with. But even with simpler potions, she appreciates how the brew rewards those with patience and precision. Potions cannot be rushed or simplified to be made easier. It takes a certain level of skill to succeed at brewing even the most mundane of potions. She hadn't been surprised in the slightest when Malfoy had pursued his Mastery in the subject.

Malfoy.

She snaps out of her trance, turning to face him once more.

Upon noticing that he had her attention once more, he smirks. “Surely you didn’t come all this way, at this hour, to check in on my classroom?”

“No, you’re right, my apologies,” she begins. She shifts from one foot to the other, wringing her hands together as she looks anywhere but him.

“I want your honesty,” she adds.

“Very well, do you need me to make the unbreakable vow as well, Granger?” he asks with his signature tone of indifference.

“No, that won’t be necessary. I trust you,” she adds.

This causes a slight flutter to pass through Draco’s core. He stares at her, eyebrows raised, awaiting her question.

“Did you leave me a cupcake in my office on my birthday?” she asks, allowing the words to tumble out.

He inhales deeply before leaning back against the table behind him and crossing his arms.

“I think you already know the answer to that Granger,” he drawls.

“Don’t avoid the question Malfoy,” she exclaims, growing rather frustrated.

“Do you really want to know the answer?” he asks.

She ponders this. Something about leaving the whole ordeal a mystery is appealing, but Hermione has never been one to enjoy not knowing things.

“Yes.”

“Very well, it was not I who left a cupcake in your office,” he replies simply, before turning and walking in the opposite direction.

This causes Hermione to furrow her brow in confusion, her mind running a mile a minute in an attempt to figure out who on earth it could be. She’d exhausted all her options at this point.

“I’m sorry to bother you Malfoy,” she says before turning to leave.

Draco feels his heart beating far too quickly, and takes a long moment to hunch over the table in front of him and breathe.

He hadn’t lied to Granger. She’d asked for his honesty, after all. He’d simply avoided having to tell the truth. For some reason, something as small and inconsequential as a cupcake was causing him to feel an extreme amount of vulnerability.

Because if he admitted to giving her a cupcake today, or rather having Gimpy place it on her desk, he would be admitting to all the years prior. And Malfoy honestly wasn’t sure if he was ready to talk about that with her just yet.

Hermione tickles the pear in the painting of the fruit bowl and enters the kitchen. “Gimpy!” she shouts. She knows that if the elves were involved in her cupcake in any way, Gimpy would know.

“Hello Miss how is Gimpy helping Miss tonight?” the elf asks with a smile.

“I have a question for you, Gimpy, and I want you to be honest with me.”

Gimpy grows quite nervous at this, suddenly worried that she has done something wrong.

“Gimpy is very sorry Miss, she did not know she was doing anythings bad!” the elf exclaims as tearsform in her eyes.

“Oh, Gimpy! No, you haven’t done anything wrong!” assures Hermione, crouching down so that she is at eye level with the emotional elf.

“I was just wondering if you happen to know anything about the cupcake that was left in my office on my birthday,” she smiles.

“Oh!” exclaims Gimpy, looking around the kitchen, avoiding Hermione’s gaze. “Er yes, Gimpy knows this cupcake, Miss.”

“Oh, and did someone ask you to make it?” Hermione clarifies.

Gimpy clamps her mouth shut, an action Hermione had seen Dobby use far too many times when he was about to say something he knew he shouldn’t.

“Gimpy did not make the cupcake, Miss,” she adds, releasing a breath. But Hermione can tell that she’s leaving something out. She remembers how Malfoy had phrased his reply *“it was not I who left a cupcake in your office.”*

Those Slytherins and their half-truths.

“But did you, or any of the other elves, bring it to my office?” the witch asks. She feels slightly guilty for wording it in such a way that she knows Gimpy will be forced to tell the truth.

Gimpy squirms uncomfortably as she toys with her ear. “Yes Gimpy did bring it to Miss’s office,” she says in almost a whisper.

“And did Professor Malfoy ask you to?”

Gimpy gasps, putting her hands over her mouth in an attempt to stop herself from speaking.

“Gimpy, I would like for you to tell me the truth please, and if Malfoy asked you not to tell me, I forbid you to punish yourself in any way for telling me.”

Gimpy releases her breath, evidently relieved that Professor Granger had asked her not to punish herself. Hermione hates the way the elves have been conditioned, but over the years she’s discovered ways to work around the barbaric way they’d been taught to self-punish.

“Yes Professor Malfoy askeded Quigley to makes the cupcake,” the elf begins. Hermione feels her heart flutter.

“He brings a recipe and everything Miss, and then Gimpy brings it to Misses office,” she adds, shifting uncomfortably. Hermione knows that she won’t punish herself for telling the truth, but likely feels very upset with herself about it.

“Thank you Gimpy,” Hermione smiles. “And don’t worry, I won’t tell Professor Malfoy that you have told me.”

Gimpy smiles her little devilish smile, “Oh thank yous Miss!” she exclaims.

As Hermione weaves her way through the dark halls towards her room, she smiles to herself. She had known deep down for quite a few years now that Malfoy had been the person to remember her day. But now she knows for certain.

Her heart beats quickly as she realises that Malfoy had been remembering her birthday since their fifth year. She wonders what this might mean. She decides to not think about it too much. At least she tries not to.



art by [shekarti](#)

Chapter End Notes

As lauracorus commented on my doc, "who needs liquid luck when you have alcohol!" We finally have the beginnings of Draco and Hermione confronting their relationship with one another! If you couldn't already tell, this fic will be a SLOWWW burn!!

Thank you again to everyone who is following along ily all ♡

The International Confederation of Wizards Championship

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the chapter that inspired me to start writing this fic, the arrival of the seven schools partaking in the ICWC! I apologize in advance, as there isn't actually much plot in this chapter, but all the information discussed is necessary so that we can move towards the good stuff!

As always, thank you for all your comments and kudos, ily all!!

Translations can be found at the end of the chapter.

Also, a massive thank you (again) to likelyunfinished and lauracorpuz for reading this chapters and giving me their feedback! ♥

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Your attention please!” says Professor McGonagall with her wand pressed to her throat. The students in the great hall fall immediately into silence, staring up at the Headmistress with wide eyes.

The floating candles with the wax that never drips hang above the students, a warm glow being emitted into the air. The tables are barren, save for the dishes and utensils, the students eagerly awaiting the arrival of their Sunday feast.

It is an especially chilly September 24th, one that even the castle’s magic hadn’t anticipated. The fires throughout the corridors were all suddenly lit earlier in the day, something that typically didn’t occur until October at the earliest.

“We have some exciting news to share with you all,” says the Headmistress with a twinkle in her eye. She stares down at the children over her half-moon glasses with a small smile tugging at her lips. Headmistress McGonagall has always come across as a serious woman, but anyone who knows her well knows that this crafted exterior is all an act. Minerva is actually quite a gentle lady, one who loves her students fiercely and would do anything to protect them.

Her life has been dedicated to educating future generations of witches and wizards, a task that is certainly not for the faint of heart. In her time, she has witnessed many of the *bravest* wizards attempt to teach children for a term, and practically be cowering in frustration by the time their contract is complete.

She is a firm believer that it takes a very specific person to be able to teach as long as she has. She would argue that the traits needed, such as resilience, creativity, adaptability, empathy, and patience, are not ones that people develop over the course of their position, they are ones they must already possess. But what Professor McGonagall believes to be most important in a successful teacher is rather simple.

They have to have caused a ruckus themselves as a student.

One may think this to be contradictory. Surely the best teachers are all rule-abiding, brown-nosing people-pleasers, but this is simply not the case.

No, nothing prepares someone to be a teacher, the person meant to guide young witches and wizards over the course of their education, better than having broken quite a few rules during their time as a student. This teacher will know what to expect and will never underestimate what children are capable of.

During her Sorting, Minerva had proved to be a hat stall: the Sorting Hat spent five-and-a-half minutes wavering between Gryffindor and Ravenclaw before deciding to place her in the former. Her Ravenclaw qualities, however, were not only displayed in the classroom, making her the top of her class but also during the schemes she and her friends conducted.

They would run about the castle, sneaking through the secret passageways and nicking food from the kitchens, daring one another to enter the forbidden forest, and pranking their fellow students.

It was because of these days she spent in Hogwarts' halls that she was well prepared for students such as the Marauders and the Weasley twins to arrive at the school. She did not underestimate them, nor assume that their wrongdoings represented of malicious intent.

No, nothing exemplifies Minerva McGonagall better than when she reprimands a student in the hall for their misbehaviour, yet offers them a biscuit once they have crossed over the threshold of her office. She has been referred to, lovingly, as Minnie by certain of these students, a name she holds very dear to her heart.

But Minerva considers herself to have a balanced experience at Hogwarts because every prank she orchestrated was an O.W.L and N.E.W.T skillset put well to use. In fact, she achieved an impressive record of top grades in O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s, Prefect, Head Girl, and winner of the Transfiguration Today Most Promising Newcomer award.

Minerva McGonagall saw much of herself in Hermione Granger from the moment she had sat on the stool, becoming another hat stall, admiring her ability to maintain this *balance* throughout her time at Hogwarts.

McGonagall was well-aware of the rule-breaking that Miss Granger had been a part of during her years as a Hogwarts student, but Minerva was quite happy to turn a blind eye, so long as nobody was in danger. She believes there is no better way to learn than when you think that you're being *sneaky*. The Polyjuice potion that Minerva had stumbled upon in the girls' lavatory in Hermione's second year had made her grin, rather than worried. She knew the girl would succeed, mostly because Hermione was undoubtedly aware of the fact that there was no teacher supervising them, ready to swoop in should something go wrong.

But as Minerva McGonagall looks down at all the students in front of her today, she feels a small tear make its way out of her eye, for she knows that this will be her last year as a teacher at the place she considers *home*.

But fret not, there is certainly nothing wrong with the Professor, she is in very good health for a seventy-one-year-old. Professor McGonagall had decided in the summer that it was time for her years at Hogwarts to come to a close, quite happy to pass off the baton to the next generation.

She has told no one of this fact, but she has big plans for Professor Lupin to become headmaster and Hermione, Deputy Headmistress. She knows fully and truly that they will rise to the occasion.

“Hogwarts will this year play host to a legendary event, the first of its kind,” the witch continues, watching the students start to stir.

“The International Confederation of Wizards Championship.”

Murmurs commence around the hall, students leaning in towards their closest friends, speculating whether the tournament will be something similar to the famed Triwizard tournament.

“This championship is the descendant of the Triwizard Tournament which was originally conceived some seven centuries ago as a way for the three largest European wizardry schools to engage in a series of magical contests while their respective student bodies experienced the benefits of cross-cultural interactions.”

Professor Granger smiles as she watches all the students react, remembering how shocked she had been during this very same announcement all those years ago. Attending Hogwarts can be isolating at times, though not necessarily in a way that can be considered bad. The ancient school feels almost like its own world, students sometimes forgetting entirely about those existing outside of the castle’s walls.

But the upcoming arrival of seven fellow wizarding schools is an event that is altogether unheard of, the first of its kind. Some students seem to realise this, grinning to themselves at the fact that they get to witness history. Many of them had certainly lived through *history* during their childhoods, students in the upper years even possessing memories of Voldemort’s regime. But this history is one that they are happy to be a part of, the kind of magical history that depicts what’s good about the world of witches and wizards, rather than the darkness that is so often remembered.

“Tomorrow, delegations from the Beauxbatons Academy of Magical Arts, the Durmstrang School of Wizardry, Castelobruxo, Ilvermorny School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Mahoutokoro School of Magic, Uagadou School of Magic, and Koldovstoretz will journey to Hogwarts,” McGonagall continues, the excitement growing throughout the Great Hall. Students’ voices are no longer at a whisper, and conversations break out amongst peers in excitement.

McGonagall stands tall, her lips pursed with a disapproving stare aimed in their direction. She remains silent until the students realise that she is waiting for their silence. Some students shush one another with vigour.

Once the hall is so silent that one could hear a quill drop, she continues. “This year, our home will be their home. I ask only that you endeavour to make it a happy one.”

Professor McGonagall turns towards Hermione and gestures for her to join her at the podium. Professor Granger pushes her large chair back and makes her way toward the stand.

She clears her throat before commencing, “I know that you will all offer our visitors a warm welcome, something that can be rather difficult with the language barrier we may face while attempting to form friendships.”

Students start to nod in agreement as she continues, “For this reason, I will be placing an enchantment over the wards around the castle this evening, one that permits for the comprehension of spoken language, of any language to all those within its boundaries,” she explains.

Malfoy raises his eyebrows in shock, immediately running through the extreme amounts of magic needed for such a thing. Not only would Professor Granger have to have included over ten

languages in this enchantment, but various dialects as well. He realises that this is actually a terrible underestimation, because Uagadou alone is the wizarding school for the entire continent of Africa, and therefore home to approximately one-third of the world's languages. His mind takes off, attempting to decipher how she could have come up with such a spell.

“Essentially, whatever words you speak will register in the listener’s mind in the language of their choice,” she explains with a smile, her hands waving in such a way that proves she is very excited at the prospect.

“I encourage you all to use this opportunity to make new friends, learn about cultures from around the world, and expand your minds. This is not an occasion that happens frequently, having so many diverse groups of magic users in one place.”

Draco has to admit, he is rather excited by this prospect as well. He’s always found the magic from Russia to be particularly fascinating, their potions specifically. The possibility of being able to converse with them without any kind of miscommunication is exhilarating.

At the Slytherin table, Cassie sits with a devilish grin on her face, already brainstorming all the ways she can use this enchantment to her advantage. Nothing malicious, she is just looking forward to having possibly over forty new students to ... meet. She hadn’t been accounting for having words at her disposal, and this enchantment of Hermione’s would make this year possibly even more amusing than she had previously anticipated.

After weeks of corresponding with Jocelyne, Professor Granger thanks Merlin that her role as liaison is coming to a close. Professor Malfoy feels similar, already loathing his forced correspondences with the Transfiguration Professor from Beauxbatons, Monsieur Dubois who proved to be an extremely eccentric man.

After lunch, the Hogwarts student body gathers in the courtyard, their afternoon classes cancelled to allow for them to witness the arrivals of the other schools. They chatter excitedly amongst themselves, peering in all directions in anticipation. None of the students have a clue what to expect, many hypothesising how the schools will arrive.

“Dragons!”

“Surely they will apparate.”

“You can’t apparate within the Hogwarts grounds, you know this.”

“Perhaps brooms?”

“Magic Carpets!?”

Hermione smiles as she eavesdrops on the students’ wonderings, appreciating the way their minds are working through all the modes of transportation possible.

Truthfully, and perhaps even embarrassingly, Hermione is also wondering how the other schools will arrive. She can predict that Durmstrang and Beauxbatons will arrive in a similar manner to before, but the other schools all remain a mystery.

Suddenly, the Black lake begins to bubble, the dark waters rippling towards the shore, splashing over the jagged stones. A long black mast emerges from the surface, rising higher and higher until the form of a ship finally becomes visible. The waters splash aggressively as the Black ship emerges in all its glory, appearing almost skeletal and ghostly.

The students shout in excitement as the ship meanders towards the dock. Elizabeth and Bea squeal in excitement and wonder, their first year off to a momentous start. They still find themselves shocked almost daily by the seemingly endless possibilities of *magic*.

A line of six students in thick, red fur cloaks emerges from the ship, walking in a uniform line behind their Professor. Hermione has to stifle a gasp as she realises who this professor is.

Viktor Krum.

Originally, they had kept in touch as pen friends over the years. However, their correspondences have sizzled out over time as their adult lives increased their responsibilities tenfold, and childhood romances were long forgotten.

After watching him greet Professor McGonagall, Hermione feels her heart skip a beat as he approaches her next. She extends her hand towards him, almost in muscle memory, as he bows and offers her a kiss on her hand with a smile.

“Professor Granger, you are as breathtaking as always.”

Hermione notes that while his accent is still strong, his enunciation appears to have improved greatly over the years. She wonders if perhaps he would even be able to pronounce her given name.

A few rows over, Draco rolls his eyes at the sight, scoffing at the way Krum bows. He remembers all too well the way the Seeker had grovelled at Granger’s feet in their fourth year, though he had tried to forget many, *many* times. Draco decides the Bulgarian looks ridiculous in his furs, which are altogether unnecessary for the current weather.

The Durmstrang students follow behind their Professors as they make their way toward the castle. Excited chatter breaks out once more, many squeals emerging from witches who are now *quite* looking forward to this academic year.

But the chatter ends as quickly as it began, a small speck appearing in the distance over the Forbidden Forest. Hermione already knows who this will be, Beauxbatons.

The speck grows larger and larger until its shape becomes decipherable, a gigantic powder blue, horse-drawn carriage. It appears to be the size of an exceptionally large house, pulled through the air by a dozen winged horses the size of elephants.

Hermione smiles to herself, thinking of Fleur, Victoire, Louis and Dominique. There had been a great debate between Bill and Fleur as of late regarding where their children would study: Hogwarts or Beauxbatons. Hermione selfishly hopes they attend Hogwarts but also empathises with Fleur’s desire to send them to her Alma Mater.

The carriage lands with precise elegance, the horses trotting to a halt. The students of Hogwarts remain silent, their breaths held in anticipation.

Monsieur Dubois emerges first with flair, gesturing dramatically to the carriage behind him as the students begin to emerge. Six students adorning light blue clothing made of silk tiptoe delicately down the stairs into the grass, many of the students shivering at the cold.

They approach the Hogwarts Headmistress with such elegance that it appears as if they are floating. After a short greeting, they move quickly into the castle in an attempt to escape the cold.

By now, the students have grown restless, anxiously anticipating the arrival of the other schools. Hermione realises that this whole ordeal was certainly much shorter than when it had just been the three European schools.

Professor Malfoy is one of the first people to notice the waters of the great lake ripple once more, though in a slightly different way than when the Durmstrang ship arrived. The water rises, creating almost a bubble of clear water spinning at a great speed. It spins and spins; the light reflecting off of the water causing the sphere to look as if it is glowing.

Every person in the courtyard stares in awe, wondering if the bubble will burst. Hermione can feel herself holding her breath as she watches, marvelling at the magic she is witnessing.

The bubble does burst, but instead of water spraying in every which way, the water droplets rise into the air, sparking like individual stars, before slowly descending back towards the lake. In their wake, is the head of a dragon.

Upon further inspection, Malfoy realises that there are seven heads, though he is unsure if there are seven separate dragons, or if they belong all to the same body.

The heads begin to peek out of the water, all moving about in different ways. On the neck of each head is a witch or wizard, holding the reins of the serpentine dragon. They guide the creature towards the shore with alarming precision. Malfoy wonders if there is a connection between the minds of the riders and the minds of the dragon.

The bright red dragon causes Hermione to recall all she knows about polycephalic creatures. Though they are quite rare in biology, they are commonly featured in muggle mythology. And, as many of us know, muggle mythology is often just very real magical tales that have changed and evolved over time, becoming almost unrecognisable from the actual occurrence. The greek 9-headed Lernaean Hydra, for example, was a very real creature, though now unfortunately extinct.

The seven heads are what confuse Hermione at first. She was familiar with the tale of *Yamata no Orochi*, or simply *Orochi*, the legendary eight-headed and eight-tailed Japanese dragon-serpent. She strains her mind as she attempts to recall the significance of the number seven in Japanese Mythology.

She believes it has to do with their Gods, and perhaps luck. That makes sense, she decides, they are here for a championship after all. She seems to remember something about the number seven having a connection to Buddhism.

She feels disappointed in herself, for her lack of knowledge about other cultures, typically priding herself in being a fairly knowledgeable and well-versed individual. She vows to ask Professor Sakurai about it later that evening.

The students float off of the dragon and land gently on the shore. Each of them turns in unison towards the dragon and bows deeply, their nose aimed toward the stones beneath them. In a flash,

the dragon dives beneath the water again, disappearing completely. Hermione hopes that the Giant Squid doesn't cause any problems.

The six students and their professor approach McGonagall, bowing one by one in front of her. McGonagall bows clumsily in return, clearly confused as to what is expected of her. Draco chuckles ever so slightly at the sight.

The students' uniforms of silk take on the form of a kimono, the fabric wrapped around their core with square sleeves and a broad sash. Hermione notes that there are various colours of uniforms ranging from dark pink to red and one gold. She wonders if these represent different houses, or something entirely different.

As a matter of fact, the robes at Mahoutokoro are enchanted to grow as their wearer does, and change colour to indicate the wearer's scholastic progress, starting off pale pink and ending up gold if top marks were achieved in every subject.

It is also important to note that if a student breaks the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy, or betrays the Japanese wizard's code by practising Dark Magic, the uniform turns white. This student would then be considered a disgrace, and would immediately be expelled and face a trial with the Japanese Ministry of Magic.

The students make their way inside, and Hermione notices the witch in gold robes wave toward Professor Sakurai. She realises this must be his sister, Mei, whom she had heard so much about.

Hermione smiles to herself, enthralled by how much extraordinary magic she has already witnessed today. She finds it important to stop every now and then, and marvel at the magnificence of magic—determined to never stop being amazed by the possibilities.

Draco feels a nudge at his leg and looks down to see a smiling Quigley with a tray of hot cocoa levitating next to him. "Would Mister Malfoys like a hot chocolate, sir?" the elf asks.

"That would be lovely, Quigley," Malfoy smiles, accepting the mug floating towards him. He looks towards Granger, noticing that she is crouched down next to an elf, speaking animatedly with them. He has no doubt that this whole hot chocolate ordeal is her doing as he watches various elves make their rounds, offering hot chocolate to the entire student population. He notices Bea has taken on the task of helping, carrying a tray of her own next to Gimpy. He smiles.

Suddenly, there are exclamations coming from students, all pointing towards the sky once more. Seven small specks are heading towards the school. Malfoy squints in an attempt to decipher what type of magical creature it could be this time. He feels slightly let down when he notices that they are nothing more than standard brooms.

Hermione grimaces as soon as she realises who is arriving, their blue and cranberry robes a dead giveaway: Ilvermorny. Though, she has to admit that the reasoning behind these colours has always made her smile. The founders of Ilvermorny, Irish immigrant Isolt Sayre, and her No-Maj husband James Steward had chosen these colours not because of any complicated symbolism, but because James rather enjoyed cranberry pie, and Isolt had wanted to be sorted into Ravenclaw as a child. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, she had been unable to attend Hogwarts, hence the creation of Ilvermorny.

The seven witches and wizards fly in a triangle formation, reminding Hermione of birds migrating south for the winter. They land with ease in the courtyard, each member swinging their leg off of

their brooms in unison.

Jocelyne approaches McGonagall with an outstretched hand, clearly intending to shake her hand. McGonagall looks slightly perturbed by this at first, but quickly accepts Jocelyne's hand.

Hermione braces herself as Jocelyne approaches her with outstretched arms. "Hermione! Darling, how are you?" Her tone sounds sincere, but Hermione knows better.

"Jocelyne, so lovely to see you," she smiles, her tone cheery yet insincere.

"I am just so looking forward to catching up with you!" the blonde witch exclaims excitedly.

Hermione releases both her shoulders and a breath she hadn't realised she was holding as the witch walks away, thankful that that interaction is over with.

There is suddenly a great kerfuffle as shapes approach in the sky from two separate directions, from both southwest and northeast. Draco wonders if they'll collide, thinking to himself that it would be quite funny, though likely quite a bit of paperwork, and surely a headache for all involved.

From the southwest approaches seven magic carpets of a variety of colours. Though magic carpets have largely fallen out of fashion in Europe and North America, Hermione knows that they had only continued to change and improve within South America. She decides she might not mind riding on one, it appearing somehow much safer than a broom in her opinion.

The carpets all come to a halt when they are approximately a foot off the ground, allowing their riders to step off onto the stones below. All the witches and wizards of Castelobruxo are sporting bright green robes outlined by yellow line patterns, with red ring patterns on both of the upper sleeves, and yellow and blue triangular patterns in a stripe halfway up the hem with two tassels of the same colours attached to it.

The students all snap their fingers, the carpets rolling themselves and shrinking to the size of a parchment. Each student places the carpet in a pocket at the side of their robes, acting as a holster of sorts.

The Professor, who introduces himself as Leonardo Borage, greets McGonagall with a smile, his dark hair tied into a bun on the top of his head. His eyes twinkle as he catches Professor Granger's smile. She wonders if he is perhaps related to Libatius Borage, author of Advanced Potion-Making, the textbook used with N.E.W.T level students.

Not a moment after the visitors of Castelobruxo have disappeared into the castle, do the visitors of Koldovstoretz make their descent.

Both Hermione and Draco have to stop themselves from rubbing their eyes at the sight. Originally, Draco had thought the witches and wizards to be riding brooms much like those of Ilvermorny. However, each person is on a fully uprooted tree.

Some students giggle at the sight but quickly fall silent as the students step off of their trees. The Professor steps off last, all six students falling onto one knee with their heads bowed in response. They are wearing robes of deep navy blue, each one trimmed with different colours: coral pink, turquoise, amber, and violet. They each have a hood covering their heads, with a scarf wrapped around their necks.

The Professor approaches McGonagall and offers her a bow, though it is only his head that moves, the rest of his body remaining rigid. He turns at a forty-five-degree angle and starts walking towards the school, his students quickly standing and following behind him in a single-file line.

Hermione looks around, wondering where on earth the students from Uagadou may be arriving from. She was feeling quite overwhelmed with the sheer amount of things she had witnessed today, uprooted trees, flying carpets, a seven-headed dragon—but nothing could have prepared her for what she sees next.

Hagrid marches up the hill from the gates, a grin spread across his face. Hermione grows fearful because if she knows anything, it's that any creature that causes Hagrid to smile like that, is certainly something one should be wary of.

Suddenly, three animals walk slowly up the hill towards the castle. The first that Hermione can identify is a Tebo, an ash-coloured magical warthog commonly found in the African countries Congo and Zaire. She gawks, for these creatures are known to be dangerous, and able to make themselves invisible.

The next creature appears to be a Nundu, a large East African magical beast that resembles a leopard. Hermione, however, remains unsure, as she had never actually seen one depicted. She grows fearful of the creature, wondering if she should start casting protective enchantments around the students.

Finally, there is the unmistakable shape of an Erumpent, a large grey African beast resembling a rhinoceros. Weighing up to a tonne, it has a thick hide that repels most charms and curses, a large, sharp horn upon its nose and a long, rope-like tail.

Draco stares in awe at the trio, watching as they approach the students before coming to a sudden halt. Much like Professor Granger, Malfoy wonders if he should start casting wards.

However, the three beasts suddenly shift and change, three young men standing where the beasts had once been. Draco gawks, wondering how on earth these three students had managed to become not only animagi, but also magical beasts, which is extremely rare.

Hermione knows they are not animagi, their transformations causing her to remember the fact that Uagadou is famous for its students' abilities of self-transfiguration. She releases a breath as soon as she remembers, thankful that none of her students would be dying as a result of the fatal breath of a Nundu.

Four other people walk up the hill with smiles on their faces, embracing their friends who had arrived before them. Hermione doesn't doubt that the rest of them can transform into other forms as well, perhaps common animals. It is logical that they would send the three most impressive transformations to start.

The students all wear brown robes with matching brown caps, and the girls a golden brown headwrap. Their headmistress approaches McGonagall with a smile, pulling her into a tight hug. She babbles quickly in a language unknown to Hermione, who holds her breath as she waits to see if her enchantment is functional. Sure enough, McGonagall appears to understand perfectly, replying in her thick Scottish accent.

Draco nods his head, impressed by the display.

The Great Hall has been transformed completely while the students were outside greeting their guests. The banners of each of the schools hang behind the Head table with seven extra seats, the house tables stretched slightly to accommodate the extra witches and wizards.

Professor Granger watches as the Hogwarts students arrive at their tables, noticing the visitors that have chosen their spots at random. Ilvermorny and Castelobrujo sit at the Gryffindor table, Durmstrang and Mahoutokoro with the Ravenclaws. The Hufflepuffs are joined by Koldovstoretz and Beauxbatons while the students of Uagadou are the only ones to sit at the Slytherin table.

Hermione watches the tables in awe as her enchantment works perfectly, taking note of Cassie speaking animatedly with one wizard from Uagadou, the Nundu, if she remembers correctly.

But while Hermione stares out into the crowds of students with a grin on her face, Malfoy stares at her with an equal expression of awe. He's always found her mind to be a rather inexplicable sort of magic, one he cannot even fathom having in his own head. The way she approaches problems and solves them with seamless efficacy has amazed him time and time again. Her success at removing his dark mark was only one of these many times.

But what he finds the most intriguing is the way she downplays her successes. Draco believes Granger should never shut up about her accomplishments, but he also knows that this is simply not who she is.

"So Granger," he begins, the witch quickly turning her head towards him.

"Care to explain this linguistic enchantment?" he prompts, hoping to send her off on a tangent. He quite enjoys listening to her ramblings.

"Well, it's fascinating actually," she begins, launching wholeheartedly into her methodology.

"At first, I assumed I would have to catalogue all the languages that may be spoken and key them into the enchantment. But then I realised this was nearly impossible..." she trails off slightly, looking to Malfoy.

He nods, encouraging her to continue. He's noticed that she does this often—stopping herself as if she's worried that she's boring the person she's speaking to. Though, he assumes Potter and Weasley weren't the best listeners.

"Anyway, after many sleepless nights, I realised it isn't the languages I need to be considering, but rather the speaker's intended meaning."

This causes the puzzle pieces in Draco's mind to start to click into place. "Ah, so it isn't the actual words they are speaking, but the message they want to convey," he adds.

Her eyes light up at this, clearly pleased that he's following her train of thought. He notices that familiar feeling in his stomach that seems to have become more frequent since his arrival at Hogwarts, the one that feels like fairies are fluttering about in his core.

"So the spell is actually based on a combination of semantics and pragmatics, thereby taking into account both word meanings, and their various meanings within a context."

Draco nods, impressed.

“So essentially the enchantment picks up on what the speaker is trying to say and flips the words into a comparable utterance in the language of the interlocutor, taking into account the context of the interaction as well.”

Draco finds himself staring at her lips as she speaks, noticing the way her tongue moves in her mouth, and the way she bites down on her lips when she’s unsure about to say next. He also notices the slight pink on her cheeks, surely from the long time they’d spent out in the chilly autumn air.

“I actually wanted to test it out on you Malfoy, if that’s okay?” she asks suddenly.

“Hm?” he asks, attempting to play off his confusion.

“Well, since you speak two languages, and seem to be rather proficient in both, I was wondering if you would still hear French in your mind *in French* , or in English, since it was your first language,” she explains.

“Monsieur Dubois,” he says quickly, staring in the direction of the Beauxbatons professor.

“Oui, Monsieur Malfoy?” he replies with a confused look on his face.

“Comment trouvez-vous le Château jusqu’à présent ? La cuisine vous convient-elle ?” Malfoy asks. His voice reminds Hermione of a violin, or rather the entire strings section of an orchestra. His voice rises and falls like a melody, each sound clearly enunciated. She smiles to herself as she realizes she can now understand every word he is saying.

“Oui, c’est excellent, bien qu’il fasse extrêmement froid ici,” the Monsieur Dubois replies, shivering as he does for dramatic effect.

“Faites-moi savoir si je peux faire quelque chose pour aider à la transition,” smiles Draco warmly, raising his goblet in Dubois’s direction.

He turns back to Hermione, with a confused look on his face. “It’s odd,” he begins. She wonders if perhaps her enchantment wasn’t intricate enough to take into account brains that understand more than one language.

“I understand everything he is saying, but it’s just the meaning itself,” Malfoy explains. “I don’t picture the words in my mind. I just understand what he’s saying.”

Hermione nods, understanding. “Well, that’s perfect then!” she exclaims, tucking into her dinner with a grin.

That evening, as Professor Granger lies awake staring at the ceiling above her bed, she wonders if it would be odd to ask Malfoy to speak French to her from now on. Just the thought of it sends a shiver down her spine.

Please note that I have done my best to include what canon information exists about the various schools, while also expanding them for the sake of this story. I spent quite a lot of time researching multiple things that were included and did my best to ensure that they were culturally accurate. But, please, if you catch anything that isn't please let me know and I will alter it ASAP.

“Comment trouvez-vous le Château jusqu'à présent ? La cuisine vous convient-elle ?” = "How are you enjoying the castle so far? Is the food to your liking?"

“Oui, c'est excellent, bien qu'il fasse extrêmement froid ici,” = "Yes, it is excellent, though it is very cold here"

“Faites-moi savoir si je peux faire quelque chose pour aider à la transition,” = "Do let me know if I may do anything to assist with the transition"

*I just found these amazing edits inspired by Mahoutokoro <https://youtu.be/V6JBr6tnDSw> & Beauxbatons <https://youtu.be/p1NztC2QV8Q> / <https://youtu.be/nh5qqbfwrbo> & Durmstrang <https://youtu.be/qLxG2kc20GQ>

Cogitationes meas verbis coram me

Chapter Notes

two uploads in two days? who am I?

Huge thank you to likelyunfinished and lauracorpus for giving my chapters a read & assuring me that they're postable!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Though there are only fifty extra people within Hogwarts' walls, the castle feels as if it is bursting at its seams. The library, which had been desolate weeks prior, is now filled to the brim with students arguing over who possesses the rights to the various tables in the space. The rain beats aggressively against the stained glass windows, causing the face of Godric Gryffindor to appear as if he is shedding a tear.

Seven unused classrooms had been transformed into miniature common rooms for the visiting schools. The decor imitated that of their own schools in an attempt to help them feel at home. Professor Granger had even enchanted the windows to reflect that which was visible from their windows at home. Each room also contained a large round table, one that was intended to be used for the lessons of the visiting seventh-year students.

Overall, Professor Granger believed the set-up to be far more conducive to normalcy than the visitors having to live on a ship.

As is to be expected by anyone who knows her well, Cassie has already been invited to three of these common rooms within the short time since the schools had arrived: Uagadou, Castelobrujo, and Mahoutokoro. Her desire to familiarise herself with the visitors was not based solely on the romantic intrigue of a girl her age, but also on sheer determination. A determination to learn as much about these schools, and by association, their future champions as possible. She believes that this will ensure that she will be able to beat them when she is chosen as Hogwarts champion because she's chosen to believe that she will be.

She had read about the law of attraction over the summer in Witch Weekly and had decided to give it a go. She repeats the words *I am the Hogwarts Champion* over and over in her mind throughout her days. It's gotten to the point that she recognises she is bordering on obsessive, but she doesn't really care.

So far, Cassie has learned quite a bit about the visiting students. Most importantly, the self-transformations that the Uagadou students are capable of are not *full* transformations. Simply put, while the students may appear as magical beasts such as Nundus and Tebos, they do not possess the creatures' magical abilities. She had held back a sigh of relief when she'd learnt this after carefully bringing the topic forth.

She'd also expressed an interest in the legendary duelling techniques taught at Mahoutokoro. One student explained the way they made use of the traditional battle techniques of the Samurai, their wands acting as their swords. After a demonstration, Cassie had grown slightly worried, realising that each and every student visiting from Mahoutokoro is lethal in a way she had never encountered.

From the students of Castelobrujo, she learned of their specialties in Herbology and Magizoology. It seems that all the students are far more advanced in the handling of magical creatures and plants than any Hogwarts curriculum had ever dreamed of covering. This also concerns her, because she is certain that the championship will involve both magical plants and creatures. She is indeed a N.E.W.T student in both Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures, but what she has learned seems almost juvenile compared to the understanding these students evidently have.

The students from the other four schools are slightly less friendly, from what she can tell. She has yet to find a way to initiate contact with any of them but plans to over the next few days.

Cassie manages to juggle her responsibilities as Head Girl, Captain of the Slytherin Quidditch Team, her N.E.W.T classes, as well as her scheming with ease.

Much like her goddaughter, Professor Granger is a whirlwind of responsibilities. Not only is she teaching two subjects, both Charms and Alchemy, but she is also maintaining her weekly check-ins with the muggleborn first years.

"How have your first few weeks been?" she asks with a smile. Across the desk is Elizabeth, sitting in a relaxed manner on the plush red chair.

"Good, Bea and Caelus come down to the dungeons every few nights to watch the Giant Squid with me," she grins.

"Have you been to Gryffindor tower?" Hermione asks.

Elizabeth remains quiet for a moment, as if trying to plan her response carefully. "No," she begins, shifting around in her chair.

Professor Granger can tell that Elizabeth is leaving out some key information. "Oh, why not?" she prods.

"Some of the Gryffindors, they don't like me," she explains, her voice timid.

"Whyever not?" asks Hermione, aghast. The girl points to the Slytherin emblem over her heart.

"Ah, I see," replies Hermione, sitting back. She finds this to be quite troubling, and entirely nonsensical. She supposes she can attempt to understand where some of the Gryffindors' anger originates from. Perhaps they lost loved ones during the war, and have been fed stories of the evil Slytherins by their family members as a result.

She herself had certainly held these prejudices throughout her time at Hogwarts, believing that all of Slytherin house was born with evil already coursing through their veins. But, when presented with an alternative perspective, she had been more than willing to at least consider it.

It bothers her that this sort of prejudice still exists within the castle's walls, and she grows determined to do something about it. But, what disturbs her even more, is the fact that Elizabeth, a muggleborn first year, is being lumped into this hatred solely by association. If anything, she, much like Professor Granger, would have been a target for these so-called evil Slytherins, much more so than the pureblood and half-bloods making her feel uncomfortable.

"I will have to mention that to professor Longbottom," she begins. "I will not mention your name, Elizabeth," she adds quickly, noticing the fear in the girl's eyes.

"I want to play Quidditch," the girl adds suddenly. From the way the words pour out of her mouth, Professor Granger can decipher that the witch had been wanting to discuss this topic since the beginning of the meeting.

"Well, you'll be able to try out next year," the Professor smiles.

"I don't think I'll make it," Elizabeth admits with a frown.

"Why's that?"

"All the other Slytherins, they've been flying on brooms for years now."

Hermione nods in understanding. "Well, I know of someone who may be able to help you prepare, should you wish."

Elizabeth looks up at the Professor, her eyes wide. "Really?"

"You've met Cassie, yes?" the Professor asks.

"Yes, she tucked me into bed on the first night," the girl smiles. Though she doesn't mention it to Professor Granger at this time, she and Bea have become somewhat of an unofficial fan club for the Slytherin Head Girl, believing her to be the coolest witch they've ever met.

"Well, she is also the Seeker for Slytherin," Hermione smiles. "You'll be able to see her play next week," she adds, remembering the Slytherin versus Gryffindor game the following week.

The girl grins in response, already counting down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until the first match.

In the dungeons, Professor Malfoy is extremely occupied, *thank you very much* .

He realises that he's never truly appreciated his Godfather's career until he stares at the stack of parchment that is the same height as the cauldron of Felix Felicis simmering next to him. He'd been inspired by Slughorn's lesson in his sixth year and had decided to brew a vial of liquid luck as motivation for his N.E.W.T students.

Marking essays, he decides, is the bane of his existence. He can't even imagine Granger's workload, considering she is teaching two entirely different subjects. Though he supposes her swotty tendencies are likely an asset when it comes to such a thing as marking student essays containing nothing more than mediocrity.

He remembers her mentioning a spell she had created that transfers your thoughts onto parchment, and so, after stirring the potion in front of him three times in a clockwise motion, he heads upstairs

with the stack of parchment in hand.

Professor Malfoy knows for a fact that Professor Granger also has sixth-period prep on Fridays. It's not that he's committed her schedule to memory per se, but rather, has taken to noticing her whereabouts from time to time.

He knocks on the door to her office hesitantly, noticing that his palms are quite clammy. He straightens his posture and adjusts the collar of his robes as he waits for the door to swing open.

But when the door does open, it is not Professor Granger that is there to greet him, but Elizabeth.

"Hullo Professor Malfoy," she smiles.

"Hello Miss Beverly," he replies simply, glancing over the small witch's head towards Granger.

"Goodbye Professor Granger!" the girl sings, taking off in a skip down the hall.

"Malfoy," Hermione greets him.

"Granger."

They stare at one another for a moment, both parties equally confused by what they should say. The words Draco had been planning to speak had floated away from his grasp the moment Elizabeth had opened the door, an occurrence he hadn't accounted for.

"I was marking these rather abysmal essays," he begins, attempting to lighten the mood.

The witch smiles hesitantly.

"When I remembered you mentioning a spell that transfers your thoughts to parchment, and wanted to ask you for the incantation."

Draco notices her eyes twinkle, the candlelight causing her brown eyes to resemble pools of honey.

"Oh yes, it does certainly speed the marking process along," she smiles, standing and rounding the desk towards him.

"So you point your wand at your temple," she begins, depicting the motion. Draco imitates this, ready for the next step.

"Then the incantation is *cogitationes meas verbis coram me*," she adds, her enunciation precise. She moves her wand in an arc-like motion towards the parchment in front of her as she stares in his direction.

She looks down at the parchment in front of her and quickly folds it, placing it behind her.

"Okay," Draco nods. He repeats the steps, the words *no cohesion whatsoever* appearing on the essay in front of him. He smiles, clearly thrilled by his success.

"Wow, it's even in my handwriting," he notices.

"Yes, I am rather partial to my own and opted to include that," she smiles.

“It’s impressive Granger,” he admits. He thinks that perhaps his eyes are betraying him because for a moment he swears he notices a slight flush appear on her cheeks.

“Happy marking,” she smiles, effectively dismissing him.

“Thank you, Granger,” he replies, offering her a small smile with his lips pursed.

As the wizard leaves her office and shuts the door behind him, Hermione shakes her head, staring down at the folded parchment in front of her.

He does look rather fit in his Professor’s robes, it reads. As it turns out, Hermione had been thinking of the way Malfoy looks in his scholarly robes when she’d cast the spell. The ones he is wearing today remind her of their Oxford robes from all those years ago.

She casts an incendio followed by an evanesco, not wanting anyone to lay their eyes on the words she had unknowingly transferred to the parchment.

November 03, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

“Drink this,” instructs Hermione, passing Draco a blood-replenishing potion.

“Did you really need an entire vial of my blood, Granger?” Draco spits, taking the potion in one swift swig.

“For the love of Helga,” the witch starts, looking at him in exasperation. Draco only smirks in return.

“Stop complaining, and try to make yourself useful,” she scolds.

Hermione starts to rifle through her small purple bag. Malfoy had realised quite some time ago that the bag in question has a very illegal undetectable extension charm placed on it.

“Here we are,” she smiles, removing an odd-looking contraption that is far larger than the bag itself.

“Granger, what on earth is that?” Malfoy inquires, staring at the device with an expression of bewilderment.

“It’s a muggle microscope,” she replies simply.

“And this microscope, does it require blood to function?” the blonde wizard asks.

Hermione giggles, but quickly stops when she notices that his question had been genuine.

“No, Malfoy, it allows me to see your blood and the cells that it is composed of. I borrowed it from the Biology Department.”

This confuses Malfoy, mostly because he’s never heard tell of the muggle study of biology or any kind of science for that matter. He watches Granger tie her hair up into a knot and remove a small piece of glass from her bag.

She plugs the machine into the wall, an action Draco finds baffling, to say the least. He wonders if this contraption pulls magic from the building to function.

Hermione flicks the power switch and rotates the lens towards the smallest option of the three. She adds a small drop of blood onto the piece of glass in front of her before sliding it onto the machine, clamping it into place.

Draco remains bewildered, staring over her shoulders, not wanting to miss a thing.

Hermione moves her eye closer towards the eyepiece and spins a dial until she apparently sees whatever she is looking for.

“Well?” Draco asks, “what do you see?”

The witch remains silent, sending a shooing motion in his direction. She rotates the lens to the second option, fiddling with the dial once more. She pauses to jot down some notes on a scrap piece of parchment before turning the lens to the final option.

As soon as the dial is evidently in place, she steps back with a smile. “Come see,” she urges Draco.

He steps forward hesitantly, awaiting further instruction.

“Look through here,” she encourages him, pointing towards the eye-piece.

He approaches, feeling quite ridiculous. Draco does not enjoy not knowing how to do something.

He peers through the eye-piece and audibly gasps. “What is this Granger?” he asks with a furrowed brow, as if personally offended by the sight.

“That’s your blood,” she replies simply.

He looks at it once more, seeing only a bunch of small specks.

“Well, that’s what your blood is composed of,” the witch explains. “And if you look closely, you’ll see small dark specks, yes?”

Draco nods as he identifies them.

“That,” she begins, pausing slightly, “is dark magic.”

October 15th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Draco has always been quite partial to the month of October. He enjoys watching the seasons change, finding peace in the predictability of their arrival. He believes that nature is the most magical entity of all, the way it is seemingly unaffected by anything, always keeping due to its course.

He can remember his sixth year at Hogwarts when he’d returned as a Death Eater, rather than the naive boy he had been the five years prior. He’d felt the world spin on its axis under his feet, the light around him dull ever so slightly.

But as he'd sat beneath his favourite tree by the Black Lake, the leaves had still changed, the hues of green shifting to warm tones of gold and brown as the weeks wore on. He admires nature for this reason because no matter what is occurring in your life, or in the world around you, the seasons will always change.

Today he takes his time as he walks around the Black Lake, breathing in the scent of autumn. He's often pondered the smell and how much he enjoys it. Sometimes he feels like he shouldn't since it is technically the smell of death—of the leaves dying and falling to the ground until they sprout once more.

But, he supposes this is a natural form of death, almost similar to that of a Pheonix. It is an act that nature intended.

He hears movement up ahead and draws his wand wearily as he approaches. He peers out from behind a tree, noticing a witch with wild hair brandishing her wand in a way he has never seen before.

After a moment of trying to understand why the witch seems to be attacking a tree, he decides it is safe to approach. He takes a few steps in her direction, clearing his throat to alert her to his presence.

The witch whips around, her wand pointed in his direction. She lowers it quickly when she realises who he is. "Professor Malfoy," she greets him cautiously, obviously slightly embarrassed to have been discovered conducting herself in such a way.

"Miss Lupin-Black," he replies with a nod. "May I ask what this tree has done to offend you?"

She smirks, and Draco takes a moment to realise how *Slytherin* she appears when she does.

"I'm just practising, for the championship," she admits.

"I wasn't aware we had chosen the champions," he jests.

"It's the law of attraction, sir," she explains in a tone of annoyance as if this clears everything up.

"And this practising involves harming ancestral trees?" he confirms.

"It's the technique taught at Mahoutokoro," she begins. "Some of the students explained it to me."

She waves her wand across her body in a sharp line, twisting her body as she does. A slicing hex tears through the air, snapping a branch off of the tree.

"It's like our duelling, but they combine elements of the Samurai," she explains. "But I'm frustrated because I can't seem to flow in the same way they do." A frown makes its way onto her face, voicing without any words her displeasure regarding her inability to succeed at something she wishes to.

Malfoy smiles at this, the girl's expression reminding him of another witch who furrows her brow in a similar fashion when she's frustrated.

"And why haven't you asked your fathers to practise with you?" he asks honestly.

The girl remains silent for a moment, looking around at the trees around her.

“They don’t want me to enter,” she explains.

“Ah, I see,” the Professor replies. He suddenly gets the urge to offer his help, and wonders why. He isn’t typically one to go out of his way to help someone if he is receiving nothing in return.

“I’ll make you a deal,” he begins, going against his better judgment.

The girl’s eyes light up as she stares at him with renewed interest.

“If you are chosen as Hogwarts champion, I will help you practise.”

A devilish grin appears on the girl’s face as she approaches him. “And I’ll make you a deal,” she says. “Since I know you’ll be much more motivated to help if you are getting something out of this arrangement as well.”

Malfoy is shocked by this statement, its accuracy essentially acting as a slap across his face. It almost frightens him, how well Cassie seems to be able to read him. Though he reminds himself that she is an extremely bright witch. And a Slytherin. And the daughter of two very powerful wizards. And Granger and Potter’s goddaughter.

He really should stop underestimating her.

“And what’s that?” he asks, intrigued.

“I will put in a good word for you,” she says with a smirk.

“To whom, may I ask?”

“Mione,” she replies simply before quickly turning and heading back to the castle.

Draco stands and stares at the tree Cassie had been in the process of destroying. Why would the girl think that he wanted her referral to Granger? Could Granger have said something to her, about Oxford?

He shrugs, deciding that it’s actually a pretty good deal, everything considered, before continuing on with his walk.

May 24, 2001, Grandpont Nature Park, Oxford

The wizard stares at the stars above him, attempting to summon the courage needed to speak the words he knows he must.

But the witch beats him to it.

“I may go to America, and do another Mastery,” she says, turning to face him.

“In what?” he asks, actually quite relieved that she has been the one to break the silence. They both know this evening is goodbye, the last night they will spend together in Oxford.

He is not so naive to think that whatever sanctuary they have formed within the borders of the ancient city will continue once they part ways. He knows that once they no longer have the alchemy lab as a reason to pull them together, his role in her life will ultimately cease to exist.

By now, Draco has tried to reach a kind of peace with this reality.

But truthfully, he believes that nothing has changed him more as a person than in the past two years with Granger. Not the war, not playing a part in the death of Albus Dumbledore, and not watching his mother tortured before his very eyes.

No, spending two years in the company of the Wizarding World's Golden Girl has transformed him completely, forcing him to become a man almost unrecognisable from the boy he had once been.

He believes that each and every particle of his being has been altered. It reminds him of the ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus' paradox—the thought experiment that raises the question of whether an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object.

He thinks of himself in such a way. He is still the same man, Draco Lucius Malfoy, yet the Draco he sees in the mirror is another being entirely from the one he had been when he'd first arrived in Oxford.

“Charms, I think.”

He nods at this. That is a logical next step. She had always been the best in their year at charms, the first to master the levitation spell, and every single charm that was taught after that.

“It's what I want to do,” she adds, referencing their earlier conversation.

“Then that is what you should do,” he smiles. “You deserve to be happy.”

“Maybe you can come to visit,” she suggests, her eyes filled with hope.

Draco remains silent, allowing the possibilities of his existence to play through his head.

He realises at that moment that while he's excellent at giving advice, he often fails to take to heart the words he speaks. He knows exactly what he wants, yet he doesn't believe he is worthy of going after it.

“Granger,” he begins, turning his body completely so that he's laying on his side. Their faces are mere inches apart. He stares into her eyes, the gold specks he's acquainted himself with staring back at him.

“I'm to marry Astoria Greengrass once I return to Wiltshire,” he says in almost a whisper.

Hermione looks confused by this, her expression then shifting to one of almost anger.

“Why?” she asks simply.

Draco cringes at her tone, one laced with threads of hurt.

“It's what I am meant to do,” he replies simply.

“And will this make you happy?” she asks incredulously.

Draco sighs, hardly surprised that the witch would use his own words against him.

“I’ll be happy enough.”

Chapter End Notes

“For the love of Helga,” was included specifically for @montana21miller on tiktok, who raised an excellent point about how its always Salazar or Godric used, and never Helga or Rowena!!

The Goblet of Fire

Chapter Notes

we all know what's about to happen tbh! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A jewelled casket is transported to Hogwarts by a task force of five Aurors. Inside is a wooden goblet with runic inscriptions etched into its exterior. At first glance, it may appear as if this goblet is meant for enjoying mead, or even firewhiskey. But, it is not recommended that you try such a thing, for it is an incredibly magical artifact.

Remus Lupin watches this casket be brought into the room behind the Great Hall with a grimace on his face. If his daughter was currently under the age of seventeen, he may be excited about the championship. But he knows his daughter better than he knows anyone, maybe even Sirius. For this reason, he is well aware of the fact that there will be no success in attempting to talk Cassie out of placing her name in the Goblet.

He can picture the events occurring as if watching them occur in hindsight through a Pensieve. He envisions Cassie scribbling her name out on a scrap piece of parchment, a wicked grin on her face. He can see her waltzing casually towards the cup in an attempt to appear like she doesn't really care about the results. But Remus knows better. He knows she cares very much.

He can't say he's ever fully understood her need to prove herself. He's certainly been proud of her these past seven years, not just because of all her accolades and accomplishments, but because of the witch he has watched her become.

Sirius seems to understand her determination, but Remus doesn't have the heart to ask him to explain how. He assumes it's because Sirius also had the fierce desire to prove himself in his youth—to prove that he was a good man. He'd been determined not to become a Slytherin, breaking a centuries-old tradition within his family. He'd been determined to become an animagus, to keep Remus company during the full moons. But mostly, he'd been determined to protect everyone he loved.

Remus sees a lot of Sirius in Cassie, though they do not share any blood. However, Remus has always thought that Cassie looks like she could be his daughter by birth—Sirius's daughter.

She too will barrel ahead, full force, if someone she cares for is in danger, not leaving their side until she is sure that they are safe. Remus believes that this fierce protectiveness she possesses was brought forth by many things, but most notably by the fact that there had been no one around to protect her as a young child.

From the few details he and Sirius had been given at the Orphanage, Cassie had not had a good childhood. Raising her had been an after-thought for her Death Eater parents, their identities still unknown. Cassie had ended up in St. Mungos at the age of four, having been left alone for four days straight and attempting to make herself dinner with what little magic she could control.

Remus thinks that if he was in Cassie's shoes, he would much rather surround himself with safety and comfort after such an experience. But, once again, he knows that this is simply not who she is.

"Cassie, could we bribe you to not enter?" Remus asks hopefully. "Perhaps a new broom?"

The witch laughs at this, a full-belly laugh as if to emphasise how humorous and ridiculous his suggestion had been.

"Dad, I'll be fine," she replies kindly. "Unless you think I'm not good enough?" she asks, feigning sadness. Cassie knows exactly how to push her fathers' buttons, and is quite happy to wield this knowledge from time to time—only when necessary, of course.

"Cassie, don't you try and guilt us like that," frowns Sirius, ruffling her hair as he walks by. "Maybe we'll just have to march up to the school and confound the cup like good old Barty, eh Moony?"

"Cassie, you're such a bright witch, you know that," Remus begins. "Your father and I have lost a lot of people in our lives. We just don't want to lose you."

Unfortunately for Cassie, Remus also knows how to push *her* buttons. He knows she hates seeing her fathers sad or worried, especially when she is the cause of it. He hadn't wanted to resort to such tactics, but he believes the situation is worthy of such a play.

"You won't lose me," she smiles, attempting to put an end to the conversation. "I promise."

"Hey Mione," Cassie smiles as she peeks her head into the Professor's office.

Hermione looks up from the paper she had been grading, her hair dishevelled. It takes her a moment to break out of whatever trance she had been in, but she quickly grins when she realises it's Cassie. "Hello love!"

Cassie decides to take this as an invitation to enter. "I wanted to talk to you about something," the girl begins hesitantly.

Hermione raises her eyebrow at this, mentally cataloguing all the times that Cassie had uttered these words to her. There was a time when Hermione had to teach her the contraceptive charm, then the charm to rid her neck of love bites. There was also the night last year when Cassie had come knocking for a sober-up potion.

"And what might that be?" the professor asks.

"About the Championship."

"Ah, yes, the cup is being unveiled this evening," Hermione stars. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Please," Cassie replies, watching in silence as her godmother goes through the motions, stirring in a teaspoon of honey to each cup.

"And you're still planning to enter?" Hermione prods.

"Yes, I am."

“Even though it will likely send both your fathers into a catatonic state?”

“Yes.”

Hermione grimaces, before taking in a deep breath and stirring her tea wandlessly with her pointer finger. “Very well, I will help you prepare then.”

Cassie’s expression shifts to one of bewilderment. “Really?” Truth be told, she hadn’t come knocking on Hermione’s door for this purpose, but is more than thrilled by the suggestion.

“Yes, really,” Hermione replies, her voice almost mocking.

“If my goddaughter is willingly throwing herself into mortal peril, then it is my obligation, no, duty, to help prepare you as best I can.” She sips her tea as she stares over the top of her cup.

“Isn’t that against the rules?” Cassie confirms.

“That’s rich, coming from you,” Hermione says quickly, though Cassie notices a smile tugging at the corner of her lips.

“I’m not saying I care. I just don’t want you to get in trouble,” Cassie clarifies with a twinkle in her eye.

“All the visiting Professors will be helping their students,” Hermione replies simply.

Cassie nods. “Good, because Professor Malfoy already agreed to help me train in combat.” She remains silent after this, allowing a moment for the words to wash over Hermione.

“Malfoy?” Hermione confirms. This revelation shocks her, though perhaps not as much as it once would have. “And what are you doing for him in return?”

“Why do you assume he wouldn’t do it out of the goodness of his own heart?” Cassie asks, mimicking concern. Hermione only raises her eyebrow in response.

“Very well, we can focus on the more academic topics then, such as runes, transfiguration, and charms,” Hermione begins. “I’ll draw up a curriculum tonight.”

Cassie smiles at this, “I love you, Mione.”

As the witch weaves her way through the castle, smiling at the familiar portraits, and taking shortcuts through the secret passageways, she momentarily feels guilty about accepting the help of the Brightest Witch of her Age to prepare for the tournament. Wouldn’t that be an unfair advantage?

She ponders this until she reaches the entrance to the Slytherin common room, deciding that she is only making use of the resources she has at her disposal—something all the other champions will undoubtedly be doing as well.

Professor McGonagall stands at the front of the Great Hall, her lips pursed together. It seems that every person within the hall is speaking at that very moment, some much more animatedly than others.

Some are discussing who they think will be chosen as Hogwarts' champion and others *how* the champions will be selected. Some first-years believe that the students who enter will have to fight a troll with their bare hands, while others speculate that there is a chimera to defeat.

Eventually, after waiting for multiple consecutive moments, McGonagall casts a sonorous charm, allowing her to project her disappointed tone.

"If I may have your attention, I can assure you all your speculations will be laid to rest."

The hall falls into silence immediately.

"Eternal glory. That is what awaits the student who wins the International Confederation of Wizards Championship. But to do so, that student must survive three tasks. Three very dangerous tasks," Professor McGonagall pauses, her eyes filled with worry. She is quite upset that her last year as headmistress could potentially be tainted by the death of the student.

She believes that she has seen enough death in her lifetime, and far too many students who did not make it past eighteen. She finds this tournament to be altogether unnecessary and an improper use of Ministry funds.

The casket is brought out into the hall by a group of five burly looking men. Hermione has to stop herself from rolling her eyes at the sight.

But behind them is a man that causes her to do a double-take.

Cormac McClaggen.

"The Goblet of Fire," McGonagall continues, gesturing towards the casket as it slowly disappears, revealing the cup beneath.

"Anybody wishing to submit themselves to the Championship needs only write their name on a piece of parchment and drop it into the flames within the next twenty-four hours. Do not do so lightly. If chosen, there is no turning back."

The hall remains silent as the students stare in awe at the cup, their minds reeling as they try to understand how such an object could be in charge of picking the champions.

The seventh-year students babble excitedly, some already removing a quill and parchment from their bags to enter. Cassie sits still, her eyes narrowed on the cup as if trying to wordlessly convince it to pick her. Her friend nudges her, breaking her trance.

"You okay?" her friend asks with a concerned expression.

Cassie only nods.

The Staff all gather in the room behind the Great Hall to have a *debrief*, though Draco finds this highly unnecessary. As he's picking lint off of his robes in an attempt to keep himself occupied, he notices a familiar face slowly making their way toward Granger.

McClaggen.

He shudders, remembering the predatory glances Cormac had sent in Granger's direction. Draco had certainly noticed during their sixth year, which he believes only exemplifies how obvious McClaggen had been—Draco had been rather occupied that year after all.

"Granger, you're a sight for sore eyes," McClaggen smirks.

Hermione decides that she detests his smirk, and him even more so. "Hullo Cormac," she replies simply, knowing that many Wizards prefer to be addressed by their surname.

"No surprise you're here teaching," he winks, slowly shifting himself closer to her. His voice is hushed, making Hermione feel all the more uncomfortable.

"Yes, and why are you here might I ask?" she asks, her tone one of displeasure.

"I'm the Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports," he explains proudly, puffing his chest out as he does. "Didn't you see the announcement in the Prophet?"

"I'm not subscribed to that rubbish," Hermione replies simply, opting to not acknowledge his career at all.

"Shame, it was quite a lovely photo of me that they chose," Cormac continues, his eyes glazing over as if reminiscing.

"As I said, rubbish," Hermione replies under her breath.

Suddenly someone clears their throat from behind them, causing both Hermione and Cormac to turn in unison toward the source. Hermione can't help the small smile starting that forms as she sees who it is.

"McClaggen."

"Malfoy! No kidding, you're here too!" Cormac laughs. Hermione decides she hates his laugh, possibly even more than his smirk.

"If you'll excuse Granger, she and I are needed outside," Draco drawls in an uninterested tone that rivals that of his godfather.

"Yeah, 'course," McClaggen smiles, clearly not picking up on the energy Draco is conveying.

"I'll see ya around, eh Granger?" he winks. Hermione purses her lips and nods.

"Unfortunately," she mutters under her breath as they walk back into the Great Hall.

"Sorry, what was that?" Draco asks. He had heard her but quite enjoys seeing her flustered, so he asks anyway.

"Nothing," she blurts.

"I'd like to offer you my condolences," Draco says, quite dramatically, with a hand over his heart.

"Whatever for?" Hermione asks, whipping her head around quickly so that she is facing the Potions Professor. She appears worried, Malfoy thinks.

“Well, all your old flames are showing up in one place. Must be a tough time to be you, Granger,” he smirks.

Hermione ponders his words for a moment. He is certainly referencing Cormac and Viktor—but ... No. Surely he isn’t including himself in that sentence, is he?

No, Hermione believes that Malfoy is surely the type of person to pretend that whatever transpired between them had never occurred. And even if he did acknowledge what had happened between them, he certainly wouldn’t bring it up in such a brash way.

But could he know about ...?

No, surely not.

“Yes, fighting against a tyrannical sociopath is certainly looking stodgy in comparison to the events currently transpiring,” she drawls.

“Did you want to cast the age line or shall I?” she asks, attempting to steer the conversation away from her love life. *Or lack thereof*, she thinks.

“You can, oh Brightest Witch of Our Age,” Draco jests, mimicking a bowing, worshipping sort of motion.

She smiles ever-so-slightly before stepping towards the cup. Hermione begins to speak, waving both her hands in unison as she circles the cup.

“qui praetereuntis, prudentis esse oportet aetatis, qui septemdecim itinera circa solem expertus est.”

“There’s no need to show off Granger,” Draco drawls.

She stays focused, allowing herself one singular eye roll before continuing.

“si quis iunior hoc temptaverit, ejicietur.”

She nods, satisfied with her work.

“Thank you,” she says quietly, turning to face him once more.

“Whatever for?” he asks, imitating her intonation.

“Saving me from McClaggen.”

“You didn’t need *saving* Granger, I simply gave you an excuse to leave,” Draco replies. “My mother taught me from a young age how to notice when a witch is being bothered by an insufferable wizard,” he explains.

“Mostly so I could come and fetch her with whatever story I could concoct at various society events,” he laughs.

Hermione is reminded of how much she enjoys his laughter. She wishes she could hear it more often. “He really is awful, isn’t he?” she whispers.

“Abysmal.”

The Hogwarts Grounds are a great comfort for Draco. They had acted as a refuge of sorts during his time as a student all those years ago. There is a tunnel in the dungeons hidden away from the Slytherin common room, one he had discovered by accident during a late-night rendezvous. This tunnel leads out of the castle, emerging by the Forbidden Forest.

He follows the tunnel this evening, casting a warming charm as he goes. The cold October air nips at his nose, his ears growing pink within moments of exposure to the wind.

He stares at the forest, his expression a unique combination of both wonder and fear. The forest had scared him greatly as a child. Something about its unknown vastness, he thinks. The trees had made him feel small, and even as a child, Draco hated feeling small.

He had also known that there were horrid creatures hidden amongst the foliage, something he had unfortunately experienced firsthand in his first year. Though he had served quite a few detentions during his time at Hogwarts, his first one had shocked him the most. Probably because he'd seen a unicorn being eaten alive, but that's neither here nor there.

Over the years after that, he'd challenged himself to enter the forest time and time again. Each opportunity he got, he would enter a few paces further than the last, determined to overcome his fear.

It's almost humorous, he thinks, and perhaps even nonsensical, this fear.

He'd had experienced the Dark Lord living in his childhood home, seen his professor killed before his eyes, and witnessed one of his oldest friends killed by fiendfyre. But, for some reason, none of these things had frightened him as much as this forest.

Only one thing had instilled such terror in his mind to the same extent as the forest before him, an event in his drawing room that is still the plot of his nightmares to this day.

Today, Draco is determined to surpass the boundary of the progress he had reached in his eighth year. So, he enters into the trees, the first step hesitant, and the second more slightly more assured. His steps quicken as he forces himself onwards, choosing to focus on the crisp air surrounding him rather than the eeriness of the forest.

He knows it would be easier to enter the forest during the day when the golden rays peak through the trees. But Draco isn't here for easy, he's here to challenge himself.

After a quarter of an hour, he reaches the point he had stopped previously. He pauses for a moment to take in his surroundings. His fingers start to tingle, and his gut is suddenly heavy with anxiety. But he continues onwards with his head down, determined.

He allows his mind to wander in an attempt to distract himself, picturing McClaggen's awful smirk. He shudders as he remembers it, not envying Granger for being on its receiving end in the slightest.

Cormac McClaggen is the worst sort of wizard, Draco thinks. And considering he had spent months in the company of Death Eaters, this is quite the statement for him to make.

Draco believes there is a fundamental difference between those who are inherently and unabashedly evil and those who attempt to hide the heinous soul they possess. While he does not wish to excuse Death Eaters in the slightest, he finds it interesting that blokes like McClaggen are permitted to walk around with an air of righteousness while being promoted to lofty places.

Draco knows for certain that Cormac's position with the ministry is a gross act of nepotism, and for some reason, this irks him. He wonders if this is partially due to the fact that he and Cormac are opposites in a seemingly complimentary way.

Draco, too, could have used his family's connections to attain whatever position he desired within the ministry. Better yet, he could have opted for a life of leisure, never lifting a finger or taking on a job at all.

But the difference is that Draco hadn't wanted this. He'd wanted to make his own name, and carve his own path.

His journey into the forest is both a physical goal for Draco, as well as a metaphorical one. While yes, it is about overcoming his childhood fear of the looming trees, it's also about proving to himself that he still possesses an ounce of the determination he once had.

"Hello Draco," he hears suddenly, his head snapping up.

"Oh, Hello Luna," he says quietly, rather embarrassed to have been discovered during his wanderings.

"Are you alright?" she asks, her expression concerned.

"Yeah, er, I'm fine."

The girl starts plucking at the air around his head, an act that greatly confuses Draco.

"You made it farther than last time," she smiles.

Draco reels back, wondering if Luna could be a Legilimens of some kind.

"You're almost there," she adds.

"What are you speaking of?" he asks, his tone sharp.

"Over the barrier, the one you constructed." The girl starts looking around with a smile, fiddling with her earrings.

"I see," Malfoy replies simply. The pair remain silent for a few moments, the sounds of the forest filling the air around them.

"He is an awful man," Luna adds suddenly, looking in his direction expectantly.

"Who?" Draco asks, quickly chastising himself for making a noise far too similar to that of an owl.

"Cormac," she adds with a frown. "But you mustn't worry about him, or any of them."

Luna starts to walk away, Draco noticing that her feet are completely bare. *Loony indeed*, he thinks.

“Luna,” he calls out, feeling quite silly as he does. “Who shouldn’t I be worrying about?”

Draco isn’t sure why he cares about Luna’s opinion to such an extent, but his curiosity is piqued. It is evident that the girl has some clue as to what she is saying, even if her delivery is anything but straightforward.

“They were only pools of water that she submerged herself in,” the witch smiles. “She did not float.”

Draco shakes his head in an attempt to decipher what the Divination Professor could mean. “Are you referencing Krum and McClaggen?” he confirms.

“Among others,” she whispers whimsically.

“Weasley?”

“Yes, I suppose him as well, though his arrow was pointed in the opposite direction,” she adds as if this is a perfect explanation.

“Your arrow never waivers,” she adds with a smile, her eyes glazed over. Draco feels squirmish under her gaze, her eyes perceiving him to such an extent that he worries they can see right through him.

“Er, thanks,” Draco replies in an attempt to be polite.

“My pleasure,” the girl smiles. “You don’t need to worry about them,” she repeats. “Even the Horned Serpent.”

Luna walks away once more, a slight skip in her step. Draco remains frozen in place, altogether confused.

Cassie sits with her knee bouncing beneath the Slytherin table, her hands firmly clasped together. She glances around the Great Hall, her eyes landing on the individuals from the visiting schools who she believes will be chosen as their champions. She looks up to the head table and makes eye contact with her father, who offers her a reassuring nod.

She notices that Professor Malfoy has his head positioned at such an angle that he can see the hall in front of him, but also Hermione out of the corner of his eye.

“If I may have your attention!” Professor McGonagall proclaims. The hall falls silent, each student hanging onto the headmistress's words in anticipation.

“I am pleased to welcome Cormac McClaggen, Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports,” she continues, her mouth pressed into a straight line. She motions for him to join her at the podium as she takes a small step to her left.

McClaggen waltzes up to the podium, taking time to run a hand through his hair. He clears his throat. “Hello everyone,” he begins, taking a dramatic pause.

“I look forward to facilitating the International Confederation of Wizards Championship, the first of its kind,” he grins, though it is a smile of a politician, for there is no warmth behind it.

“Tonight, we will witness a truly historic event. Our champions will be chosen!” he extends his arms towards the tables before him, likely in anticipation of cheering. But there is only a single “*whoop!*” from the back of the hall, causing a few students to giggle.

“Any moment now, the goblet will come to life and reveal our first champion.”

Draco listens, growing more disinterested with every dramatic pause McClaggen takes. He decides to prod into his mind ever so slightly, just to see what the wizard is thinking.

Wonder if Granger is watching me

Draco pulls out just as quickly as he had entered, quite fed up with having to hear other men’s thoughts about Granger. He looks at the seat next to me to see if she is watching.

Hermione picks at her nail beds as she waits for Cormac to stop speaking. Finally, when she hears McGonagall speak once more, she looks up.

Draco isn’t sure why it makes him happy to know that Granger hadn’t been paying attention to McClaggen’s speech.

Suddenly, the cup comes to life, the blue-white flames from the past twenty-four hours turning red as a parchment comes fluttering out of its depths. McGonagall steps forward with her hand outstretched as the parchment floats slowly towards her, landing perfectly in her palm.

The Great Hall is silent. Not a single student seems able to speak as they wait impatiently for the first name to be spoken.

She clears her throat before announcing the first champion. “The champion of Beauxbatons Academy of Magic is,” she begins, taking a pause.

Hermione decides that she doesn’t mind when Minerva makes use of a dramatic pause. She has earned the right for a little flair.

“Charles Monet,” she smiles, glancing towards the small group of Beauxbatons students. One boy stands, his curly brown hair unruly. He has a slim build, and a defined face with strong cheekbones and jaw. His Professor claps him on the back in congratulations, pushing him towards the cup.

McGonagall whispers to him, pointing him in the direction of the back room. The moment he steps away, the goblet comes to life once more.

As he walks by the head table, Remus has to do a double-take. The boy appears oddly familiar. He brushes this thought aside.

Another piece of parchment floats toward the Headmistress’s outstretched hand.

“The champion of Castelobruxo is, Luiz Fernanda.”

“The champion of Uagadou School of Magic is, Mukisa Akumu.” Hermione notes that this was the student who had appeared as a Nundu.

“The champion of Durmstrang Institute is, Nikolai Yankova.”

“The champion of Koldovstoretz is, Aleksei Petrov.”

Hermione shakes her head, bewildered as she realises all five champions thus far are boys. Surely they won't all be, will they?

"The champion of Mahoutokoro School of Magic is, Mei Sakurai."

Professor Sakurai's sister steps forward in her Golden robes, bowing before McGonagall before walking towards the back.

"The champion of Ilvermorny is, Caitlyn Jones."

Hermione watches as a girl with dark blonde hair weaves her way through her peers. She keeps her head down, with her shoulders hunched. She wonders if the girl is alright.

But, she doesn't have much time to worry about Ilvermorny's champion, because the Goblet soon comes to life for the eighth and final time. Hermione, Remus, and Draco all hold their breath in anticipation of the last champion.

The parchment emerges as if in slow-motion, so slow, in fact, that Draco questions if there is an Immobulus charm placed upon it. He wonders if his now plentiful free time will be spent duelling with Cassie, something he is both dreading, and possibly looking forward to.

"And finally, the champion of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is," McGonagall says with a grimace.

"Cassie Lupin-Black."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, no flashbacks in this chapter! But don't worry, I have a chapter planned that takes place entirely during Draco and Hermione's time at Oxford :)

Felix Memorias

Chapter Notes

I've been excited to write this chapter for a while! I hope you enjoy :)

As always, thank you for following along with this story - your comments and kudos make me sob !!!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end (I am forever in your debt).

Thank you to likelyunfinished and peoniesandcedarwood for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hermione loves celebrating things. Not just birthdays, but Christmas, Easter, and Halloween as well. She enjoys the fact that these days could be like any other, but because we have decided to assign them some kind of significance, they feel special. October 31st, for example, could just be another chilly autumn day. But, over time, through the influence of religion, and well, capitalism, this day has come to represent a whole lot more.

Hermione had researched the origins of this day as a child, finding that originally Halloween was the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. Samhain marked the end of the summer and harvest seasons and signalled the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. While the majority of wizarding groups do not partake in the tradition of Halloween to the same extent as Muggles, Hermione found that they do recognize Samhain.

The Celts celebrated Samhain on the night of October 31st when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. They believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. Hermione had always found this to be as fascinating as it was terrifying.

She remembers how shocked she'd been when she had first seen a Ghost at Hogwarts, and consequently had an entire conversation with them. Over time, Hermione learned that death wasn't something to fear.

Hermione had been curious as to why people wore costumes for the day, finding this transition from celebrating the harvest to wearing witch costumes to be altogether nonsensical. The Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids to make predictions about the future. As you may have guessed, these Druids were very real witches and wizards, typically those with the gift of sight.

To commemorate the event, the Druids built large bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities. During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes. As a

child, she'd found this aspect to be especially outlandish. Her opinion on fortune telling remained largely unchanged, even when she arrived at Hogwarts.

She still struggled to understand how over time, Halloween evolved into a day of eating an excessive amount of sweets, but she wasn't going to complain about that aspect in the slightest. Hermione is also quite partial to dressing up for one evening, enjoying the *pretending to be someone other than herself* aspect more than she'd care to admit.

This year, Halloween falls on a Tuesday. It was unfortunate, and Hermione had been rather disappointed when she'd realized. Mostly because Halloween is one of the few nights a year that she allows herself to get completely and utterly *pissed*.

October 31st, 1998, The Slytherin Common Room

"Hermione, I don't see why we had to come to a *Slytherin* party," Ron spits as he looks around the room. The common room is the perfect opposite of their own in almost every way. The rough stone walls, leather sofas, and greenish lamps hanging from chains feel almost comical to the Gryffindors who are accustomed to the warm and cozy furnishings of their home.

Hermione has to admit, however, that the green hues emitted from the Great Lake complement the atmosphere exceptionally well. She decides that the room is actually quite cozy, in its own unique *Slytherin* way.

"Because, Ronald, it's not *just* a Slytherin party. It is an open invitation to all the seventh and eighth years," Hermione explains for what feels like the tenth time in the past hour.

"Come on Ron, it'll be fun," smiles Harry, taking a long swig of firewhiskey.

"Yeah *Ronnie Kins*, cheer up," jeers Ginny, ruffling her brother's hair as she grabs the bottle from Harry, taking a swig of her own.

"I just don't want to spend my evening with death eaters," Ron begins but is quickly cut off by an exasperated Hermione.

"Ronald, for the last time, any student who is at Hogwarts this year has been granted a full pardon from the Ministry. They were children when they took the mark, and the vast majority of them didn't even want it - they were forced," Hermione's tone matches the indignant expression on her face.

"You're telling me Malfoy didn't want the mark?" Ron fumes, ready to take off on a tangent the three of them had heard far too many times.

"Respectfully Ronald shut the fuck up or leave," Ginny says with a smile that's anything but genuine.

"Maybe I will," he replies, crossing his arms over his chest.

Hermione rolls her eyes and heads into the crowd, quite happy to leave her childish boyfriend behind. She feels slightly guilty, mostly because she knows that there is no spark between them, not anymore at least. But, for some reason, she can't seem to break things off with him. As time

progresses, however, she finds herself becoming annoyed with him to the point that it's borderline intolerable.

To be fair, she knows that ending her relationship with Ron is a lot more complicated than simply breaking up with him. For one, she knows he will throw an absolute fit the moment she brings the topic forward. And honestly, she doesn't have the energy for that right now – she's just trying to make it through her first term back, and her NEWTs.

There's also the fact that the Weasleys are like family to her. She spends the majority of her free time at the Burrow, including the entirety of her summer.

While she'd brought her parents back to England as soon as the war ended, they still did not know who she was. She'd hired the best magical psychologists for the job, all too happy to put the funds the ministry had given her as an honorarium to good use. But, even after a few initial meetings with Monica and Wendell Wilkins, they were no closer to being Helen and Richard Granger than they had been when Hermione had arrived on their doorstep in Sydney.

Dr. Flanders had told her that it could be months, or even years until they would have all their memories back, so Hermione wasn't holding her breath. She had been granted permission to visit them weekly upon her return to Hogwarts at Dr. Flanders's recommendation. He believed that spending time around their daughter may help to trigger some of their memories, allowing them to fall into place.

While she looked forward to her visits every Sunday, eager to potentially witness a breakthrough each time she stepped through the floo, she had also started to dread them. She should have foreseen how difficult it would be to spend time with her parents without them actually *being her parents*. Their blank stares and confused expressions shattered her heart into a million shards every Sunday, her entire week then spent stitching the pieces back together. But, by the time she managed to find a semblance of optimism once more, seven days would have come and gone.

Hermione worried that their memories would never return, and of course, blamed herself for this. When she'd cast the obliviation spell, she'd been determined to make it as strong as possible, viewing it as almost a fortress to hide her parents within. She'd crept into every crevice of their mind and eradicated herself from existence, leaving no stone unturned.

She is, of course, thankful she had done this, especially after she'd returned to her childhood home and found it ransacked and reeking of dark magic.

But, now that the threat had disappeared, all she seemed to be able to think about is whether there had been another way to protect them, one that didn't involve forgetting their daughter.

She started to loathe the magic coursing through her veins, blaming herself for ruining her own life, and causing herself such pain.

But because of her, shall we say, lack of family right now, she has found herself all the more reliant on the Weasleys. She knows that she would still likely be invited around for dinner even if she and Ron did break up, but she is also well aware of the fact that Molly Weasley knows how to hold a grudge.

She recognizes that Molly would be extremely disappointed if they broke up, mostly because she'd started hinting at an impending engagement a few short weeks after the battle of Hogwarts.

It made Hermione feel sick to her stomach.

Besides all that, Hermione doesn't want to think about the absolute heyday the Prophet would have if they were to break up. She can see the headlines now:

IS THE GOLDEN TRIO IN SHAMBLES?

GOLDEN GIRL LOVELESS, A TRAGEDY FOR THE WIZARDING WORLD

No, Hermione doesn't want to deal with *that* right now either.

So, after much deliberation, she decided to wait it out, at least for the time being. It's not that she's necessarily unhappy, she just knows that she could certainly be *happier*.

Hermione makes her way through the crowd, the suffocating feeling of sticky bodies surrounding her, the pungent smell of firewhiskey accosting her nose. She finds a clearing to her left and makes a beeline in its direction.

"Well if it isn't the Golden Girl," smiles Theo, raising his bottle of elf wine in her direction. "Welcome to the Darkside Granger." He's laying quite lackadaisically on the couch, his legs tossed carelessly over the leather.

"Hello Theodore," she replies simply. Before this year, she hadn't spoken to the Slytherin boy much. He'd been in her classes growing up, but they'd never had much of a reason to interact beyond that. The only thing she can recall about the boy is that he's exceptionally smart, and Malfoy's closest friend.

"Please, that's my father, may he rest not in peace," Theo deadpans. "Call me Theo."

"Okay, Hello *Theo*," Hermione smiles.

"Where are Frick and Frack this evening?" the Slytherin asks.

"If you mean Harry and Ronald, they're here somewhere," she replies as she looks around.

Theo taps the seat next to him, urging her to join him. At first, she hesitates, considering the situation and all of the possible outcomes. How would her joining him on the couch appear to others? To him?

Hermione quickly reminds herself that she is no longer on the run – unable to trust anyone or anything. She is safe, everyone here is safe.

And truthfully, she could use a break from her friends. It sounds awful, she knows that, but she's sick of playing the role that she holds in their lives. To them, no matter what, Hermione will always be the brainy, bushy-haired Gryffindor. To them, she will never be the fun, exciting, laid-back Hermione that she so badly wants to be.

She hates that they assume she's happy with Ron, that she's eager to toss all her ambitions aside and start birthing an obscene amount of children like she knows he desires. She shudders at the very thought. Even Ginny seems oblivious to the fact that Hermione – her supposed best friend – is unhappy.

With a deep breath, she decides tonight is the night the new Hermione - the Hermione she wants to be - is introduced to the wizarding world. She plops herself down on the couch next to Theo and extends her hand towards him, making a grabbing motion at the bottle.

“Granger!” Theo gasps. “Surely you don’t drink!”

She laughs, “is that what you think of me?” attempting to play it cool.

“I always knew you had it in you Granger,” Theo smiles, passing her the bottle.

After a few too many swigs of Theo’s expensive elf wine, Hermione loses track of time, her face growing redder by the minute. She quite enjoys talking with someone who largely knows nothing about her. Sure, Theo knows the basics, but past that, it’s up to her to reveal to him what she wants him to know.

As the conversation continues to flow, she discovers that they actually have quite a bit in common when it comes to interests. Theo too detests flying, though he’d had a broom since he could walk. They both prefer potions, charms, alchemy, runes, and transfiguration to all the other classes, and enjoy reading in their free time.

Theo also seems to have a real interest in Muggle movies.

“I first snuck into one when I was probably thirteen,” he explains with a grin. “Do you know about Dinosaurs, Granger?”

“Yes Theo, I know about Dinosaurs,” the witch laughs. “Most muggles learn about them as children.”

“So you’ve seen Jurassic Park?” he asks.

“I have yes, but that isn’t historically accurate-”

“It’s my favourite movie,” Theo grins clearly overjoyed at the prospect of having someone to discuss the movie with. Hermione reminds herself that being fun and carefree doesn’t involve lecturing him on the lack of historical accuracy of a film.

“You know what movie you should see Granger?” Theo continues. She looks at him, raising her eyebrows.

“Titanic,” he replies simply.

“Didn’t that come out last year?” she asks, surprised.

“Yes, it did, why?”

“Well, weren’t you -er, busy last year?” she asks.

“Granger, unlike my peers, I ran away like the coward that I am; the day my father tried to make me take the mark,” Theo responds, his voice almost a whisper. “I went to stay with my mother’s side of the family, in America.”

Hermione takes a minute to ponder this information. She isn’t sure why she had assumed Theo had become a Death Eater. Prejudice, she supposes, and stereotypes. She had grouped him together

with his housemates, and *that* wasn't very fair of her.

"Oh, I'm sorry Theo," she starts, but he cuts her off with a wave of his hand.

"Don't worry Granger, I know you didn't mean anything by it," he smiles. "Want to come to have a spliff with me?"

Hermione stares at him, shocked. Her first instinct is to say no and shut down the idea immediately. But, she is trying out this whole *new Hermione* thing so...

"Sure," she smiles.

"Where do you even get that stuff?" Hermione asks curiously as they emerge into the grounds. Theo had navigated them through a convenient passageway that leads directly out of the dungeons to the Forbidden Forest.

"Hufflepuffs," Theo replies. "A bunch of them grow it in the unused greenhouse under a disillusion charm," he laughs at this as he lights the tip of the spliff with his wand.

They walk towards the forest, arriving at a small cluster of stones just by the perimeter. Theo gestures for her to take a seat, causing her to realize quite suddenly that this would look extremely suspicious to a passerby. For all intents and purposes, she is in a relationship. And said relationship is *not* with the wizard she is alone with. But, she brushes this thought aside, determined to enjoy herself.

Theo passes the spliff to her with a smile. She grabs it hesitantly, not sure how to hold it.

"Er, I've er, never really," she begins, stuttering.

"Hold it like this," Theo says as he demonstrates the proper technique. Ever the eager student, Hermione replicates the hand position, ready for the next step.

"Great, now take a pull," Theo urges. "You'll cough, but don't worry that's normal."

Hermione follows his instructions, feeling the burning sensation in her throat, slowly spreading through her lungs. She removes the joint from her mouth and immediately starts coughing, her eyes watering in the process. She looks up, her vision slightly blurred and her head spinning.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" she hears from a voice that certainly doesn't belong to Theo.

As her eyes focus once more, the first thing she notices is his snow-white hair, and that it's slightly longer than she's ever seen it. It actually has a bit of a curl to it she realizes. She smiles as she considers the fact that he may have cast a straightening charm on it in his youth.

"Hello, Malfoy."

"Theo, have you corrupted the Golden Girl?" Draco jeers.

"No, as it turns out, she's been quite the rebel all along Draco," Theo laughs, passing the spliff to his friend.

Draco takes two pulls, not coughing even once. This upsets Hermione, though she finds it funny that it does.

She eagerly accepts the spliff from him when he's finished, determined to not cough this time. As she pulls, she realizes that it isn't quite as bad as her first attempt. She still coughs, however. She stares at it with a frown.

"Did the spliff offend you, Granger?" asks Draco with a smirk.

She only rolls her eyes before passing it back to Theo.

Once they've all had their share, Hermione possibly slightly more than she should have, they all lay back on the stones in silence.

It's odd, Hermione thinks, how comfortable she feels in their presence. As she allows her mind to wander, she casts her Patronus without giving it too much thought, a habit she had developed over the past few months. She finds it comforting, to be in the presence of her otter.

"Granger?" Theo asks suddenly, both he and Draco staring at the otter floating around their heads. "You can cast a Patronus?"

"Yeah, you know, 'Brightest Witch of Our Age' and all that," she replies simply.

This causes both wizards to burst out in laughter, clearly amused by the casual use of her title.

"Can you not?" she asks, suddenly curious.

"No Granger, I can't" Theo replies, though she can tell he's disappointed by this. Malfoy remains silent.

"Can you?" she asks, her eyes glancing in his direction.

"No, Granger, Death Eater and all that remember?" he replies, imitating her tone.

"I could teach you both if you want," she suddenly offers. The words leave her mouth before she really has time to think about them, let alone realize she's offering.

"Really?" Theo asks. "What do you want from us in return?"

This confuses Hermione at first, because why on earth would they think she's offering only because she wants something? Then, she remembers that they're Slytherins. And Purebloods.

"Nothing, I just think it could be fun," she smiles, the cold October wind nipping at her cheeks. She opts to not cast a warming charm, the alcohol coursing through her veins seems to be doing the job well enough.

"Okay Granger, deal," smiles Theo.

"Sure Granger, but don't be disappointed if I can't," Malfoy grimaces, purposefully avoiding her gaze.

“Oh, Luna!” exclaims Hermione. “What is your costume?”

“A Dirigible Plum,” smiles the girl, twirling around with her arms extended. Luna’s entire torso is completely consumed by a bright orange sphere, her arms and legs sticking out of four holes. On her head, she is wearing a headpiece of green foliage.

“Oh yes, well it’s lovely,” smiles Hermione. She loves Luna dearly, especially because she never knows what to expect from the blonde witch.

Hermione had opted to wear her Dorothy costume once more, mostly because she hadn’t had the time to get any other options put together.

Sirius and Remus had insisted on hosting a small Halloween gathering. She, Luna and Neville were invited, as well as any of the other Hogwarts professors that wished to attend. The plan was for them all to gather in the Staff room and floo to the Cottage.

“Hermione, I like your costume!” Neville grins. Hermione has to laugh as she realizes that Neville is dressed as gilly weed.

“Thanks, Neville, you too!”

Hermione can’t help but feel slightly awkward now that her two friends have shown up dressed as plants, and she is in a short checkered dress with pigtails. Suddenly, she notices movement from the door, a large figure entering in all black. Her first reaction is to be scared, but, after a few deep breaths, she realizes it is in fact, Malfoy.

“Woah, Malfoy, what are you?” Neville asks, approaching the Potions Master.

“Theo tells me it is the Man-Bat,” he replies simply.

Hermione lets out a laugh at this, “Do you mean Batman, Malfoy?”

“I don’t know, it’s from some muggle movie Theo likes,” Malfoy responds, clearly not happy that she found his attire funny. “I didn’t have anything else to wear and I didn’t want Granger to berate me for coming *sans costume*.”

Truthfully, Hermione thinks that Malfoy looks quite fit, though she would never admit to this.

“It’s very interesting Draco,” Luna smiles. “You look quite dashing.”

“Er, thanks, Luna?”

After a few minutes of waiting, the four Professors realize that they are likely the only ones attending the party. They head through the floo and emerge into the cottage, the scents of Sirius’s food already wafting towards them.

“There are my second through fifth favourite Hogwarts professors!” hollers Sirius from the kitchen. At first, Hermione thinks that Sirius isn’t wearing a costume at all. But, upon closer inspection, she realizes that he’s dressed in clothes that are very different from what he normally wears. The knitted sweater and blue denim jeans are far more similar to something that Remus would wear, she thinks.

Suddenly, Remus enters the room, wearing ripped black jeans, a sex pistols t-shirt, and a leather jacket.

“Are you dressed as each other?” exclaims Hermione with a squeal.

“It was Pad’s idea,” laughs Remus.

“Mione!” Cassie screams, enveloping her godmother in a bone-crushing hug.

“Hello Hogwarts Champion,” smiles Hermione, ruffling Cassie’s hair.

“Can you help me with my costume?” the young witch asks. Hermione nods in response.

As they weave their way up the narrow staircase, they emerge into the top floor of the cottage – also known as Cassie’s bedroom.

The slanted ceiling comes to a peak over her bed with string lights strung from wall to wall. Her window looks out directly towards the castle. There’s a warm sort of glow in Cassie’s room, one that never seems to disappear.

“Stand still,” says Cassie suddenly, pointing her wand at Hermione’s dress.

“Cassie! What are you doing?” Hermione exclaims as she watches the hem of her dress shrink shorter and shorter. It finally stops at approximately mid-thigh.

“You’re welcome,” replies the witch with a smirk, flicking her wand towards Hermione one last time, the neckline shrinking a good half an inch.

“Cassie, why did you do that?” Hermione screeches, reaching for her wand. But, Cassie is quicker and disarms her godmother before she can lengthen her hem once more.

“Shut up, you look hot,” Cassie exclaims with a devilish grin as she pulls on the muggle ‘witch’ costume she had purchased in London. Cassie found the outfit to be hilarious, the pointed hat making her feel like Professor McGonagall.

Hermione catches sight of herself in Cassie’s floor-length mirror. She decides that she does actually look pretty good. She still tries to pull her neckline up slightly anyways.

The minute she reaches the bottom of the staircase, she feels Malfoy’s eyes land on her. It’s as if his gaze had become beams of light, her skin tingling where they land. She suddenly feels acutely aware of every single inch of herself, the angle of her nose, the texture of her skin. The air feels stuffy, she thinks.

Draco stares at Hermione as she walks back into the room, trying to determine whether or not her skirt had gotten short, or if he’d willed it to look that way in his imagination.

He can still remember the last time he’d seen Granger in this particular dress, the feeling of absolute hopelessness as fresh as if it had occurred only yesterday. He’d thought of it many times since, *truth be told*.

But, it appears different now from how he is sure it had been before. Well, now it looks a lot more similar to how he *chooses* to remember it, that’s for certain.

He stares at her as she walks towards the group, though he is well aware that it is rude to do so.

“-Eh, cousin?” he hears suddenly, snapping him out of his trance.

“Sorry?” Draco replies, attempting to play it off.

“I was just asking how your first two months have been,” Sirius explains. “But I can see you’re a little preoccupied,” he adds with a smile, his eyes twinkling.

Draco frowns at this, which only causes Sirius to laugh harder.

At that moment, the floo comes to life once more, with Ginevra and Harry Potter stepping through. Ginny had opted to wear her Holyhead Harpies Quidditch robes, which Draco thinks is a lazy choice. Harry, however ... he has no idea what scarhead is supposed to be.

“Potter, Weasley,” he nods in their direction, raising his glass.

“Malfoy,” Ginny replies. “It’s Potter now,” she adds, turning so that he can see the six letters on the back of her jersey.

“Ah yes, my invitation to the wedding must have been lost in the mail,” he jokes, attempting to exemplify the fact that he is no longer the prick he’s been throughout his youth.

“Oh you know Malfoy, owl post can be highly unreliable,” Harry winks.

“So tell me, Potter, what is this, exactly?” Draco asks, gesturing towards Harry’s peculiar robes.

“I’m a Jedi, Malfoy,” Harry deadpans.

“Is that some kind of career?” Malfoy asks, genuinely curious.

“It’s from Star Wars.” This title rings a bell somewhere in the far back of Draco’s mind. He’s fairly certain that Theo had mentioned it.

“I see you’re Batman,” Harry smiles. “I am vengeance,” he adds in a very low voice that causes Draco to scowl.

“What was that Potter?” he asks, exasperated.

“My Batman impression!”

“To be fair, it wasn’t a very good one,” adds Ginny with a smirk.

Suddenly, Draco realizes what the arrival of she-weasel and scarhead means, causing his heart rate to spike ever-so-slightly. “Where’s your lovely brother this evening Ginevra?” he asks, wondering if he’ll have to endure the unique pain that is witnessing Weasley try to seduce Granger.

“Which one, I have plenty,” she retorts, taking a swig of butterbeer.

“The missing member of the golden trio.”

Ginny raises her eyebrow at this, “Ronald?” she confirms. Draco only nods in response, confused by why she would feel the need to confirm. Is he missing something?

“I believe he and Dean are in Switzerland at the moment,” she replies simply.

Draco decides it’s a touchy subject and chooses to drop it, mostly because he notices Granger over Potter’s shoulder, her head tossed back as she laughs.

Ginny follows his line of sight and smiles when she realizes where his eyes have landed. As Harry turns towards Remus, Ginny whispers to Draco, “she looks hot, doesn’t she?” with a wiggle of her eyebrow.

“She looks fine,” he replies simply, his eyes never leaving the curly-headed witch. He curses Theo as he pulls at his costume, finding it to be extremely suffocating.

As Hermione notices Ginny conversing with Malfoy, she feels anxiety rising in her gut. Ginny is one of the few people who know the whole story of what transpired between her and Malfoy, but she is also Hermione’s friend who likes to meddle the most. In hindsight, Hermione realizes she probably should have kept *some* things from Ginny.

She silently prays that Ginny isn’t saying anything to get Malfoy all riled up.

To be safe, she meanders towards them, hoping to put a stop to whatever Ginny is currently whispering.

“Hello Gin,” she smiles, pulling her friend into a warm hug.

“Shut your mouth,” she whispers as her mouth is next to the redhead’s ear. She pulls away, “I’m so glad you and Harry were able to make it!”

“I managed to convince Fleur to babysit, she owes me a favour for babysitting her husband after the last full moon,” the witch laughs.

Draco’s mind starts to spin, he had forgotten that the eldest Weasley had been bitten by Greyback. The familiar sensation of guilt starts to rise in his throat. He knows that he isn’t responsible for the actions of the rabid wolf in the slightest, but he feels almost culpable by proxy.

Ever since the Dark Lord had fallen, Draco had tried his best to forget what had transpired. At first, it had been difficult with the constant reminder that was branded permanently on his forearm – but Granger had seen to that.

Now, years later, it’s almost easy for Draco to live in blissful ignorance – until a reminder comes out of nowhere, like in this moment.

Draco had suffered from panic attacks quite frequently after the Battle of Hogwarts, convinced that he could feel the darkness within him still, a sensation that never seemed to cease. It felt like a gloomy shadow that loomed over him day and night. Sometimes he felt like this shadow was more of a reflection, a reflection of himself. He would lay awake at night, staring at the ceiling above him, his own face twisted into a haunted snarl staring back down at him.

Because of his inability to sleep, he’d resorted to dreamless sleep potions, and unfortunately, became far too reliant on them. It had gotten so bad, in fact, that he’d stepped foot in his Potions lab for the first time in what felt like eons, determined to brew an alternative.

He'd succeeded, of course – with the help of Theo, though not as quickly as he would have liked. They'd worked on the potion together throughout their eighth year in the room of requirement. At first, Draco had been hesitant to enter the space that was the setting of so many of his nightmares. But, he'd willed the room to appear as a potions lab, with large wall-to-wall windows, permitting the moonlight to pierce the glass and reflect around the room.

He'd spent the majority of his free time in the lab, quite content to not have to endure any of the looks or comments from his peers. He hadn't had the energy to retort, nor was he so delusional to blame them in the first place. He knows what he was to all of them, a Death Eater.

So, the Room of Requirement had become his sanctuary once more, though this time for an entirely different reason. He finds it a perfect parallel, the fact that the room was so eager to help him heal the damage that it had helped to cause in the first place. He had to remind himself that though the room did seem sentient, it had only done as he had asked.

The potion had been simple, now that Draco thinks about it. He called it *Felix Memorias* – happy memories. He'd been inspired by the habit he'd developed during the summer before his eighth year, visiting his father's pensieve each night before bed to watch back the few happy memories he could muster. It calmed him, to watch his eleven-year-old self, full of childlike naivety and wonder. It was nice to forget what had occurred since then, even for just a moment.

But, the minute he removed himself from the memory, making the walk through the chilly halls of the manor towards his room, the feeling of impending doom would resume in his gut – the brief feeling of joy he had found dissipating into *nothingness*.

He'd known that there had to be a better option, something that allowed you to experience your happiest memories fully and completely.

Felix Memorias was designed to guide the drinker into a dream-like state, one where they could do just that – relive their happiest memories. It allowed the drinker to experience the original event with astonishing accuracy, almost indecipherable from its actual occurrence.

They had tweaked the potion until it allowed the drinker to drift to sleep, rather than holding them hostage within their own memories. Jobberknoll feathers had been hard to come by but ended up being the key ingredient to make all the difference for their brew. When combined with Lavender and Valerian root, and stirred thirteen times counterclockwise under the moonlight, the potion had been a perfect success.

Draco can clearly recall staring down at the sparkling silver potion before him, a few short days before his NEWT exams were set to begin. He'd silently prayed to Circe that it would work, all too eager to be a test subject. With Theo sitting by his side to assist with any unforeseen complications. Draco had fallen into the best sleep he'd had in a very, very long time.

At the end of the evening, everyone starts to make their way through the floo once more, both their bellies and hearts full. But, as Draco looks out into the night sky, he decides he would much rather walk back to the castle.

“Fancy a stroll, Granger?” he asks, turning to the witch next to him.

At first, Hermione looks slightly shocked by his request, her eyes filled with fire. She blinks, and the fire fades, the warm hues of cinnamon all that remains. “Sure Malfoy,” she smiles.

They step outside into the frigid night, the first day of November greeting them with a brisk gust of wind. Malfoy extends his arm out towards Hermione like the good Pureblood Wizard he is, the motion second nature to him. Hermione, however, had not attended etiquette classes since the ripe age of six and stared at his arm in confusion for a moment. She knows that he's likely offering to escort her to the castle, but for some reason, she'd assumed this type of thing was reserved for witches that a wizard was courting.

Worry creeps in as Hermione hesitates to lay a hand on him, perhaps she is frightened by him? Instead, as he glances in her direction, Draco finds that there isn't any fear in her eyes. No, Granger appears to be confused.

"My mother would be rather cross with me if I didn't offer my arm to escort you, Granger," he explains. Hermione nods, accepting his arm carefully, her fingers barely grazing his costume.

Draco decides at that very moment that he detests this Man-Bat person that Theo seems to love so much, finding his costume to be entirely impractical, itchy, and suffocating. He wishes he could cast a charm without Granger noticing, perhaps one that would allow him to feel her touch through the thick, offending fabric.

Though the stars provide enough light to illuminate their way back to the castle, Hermione finds herself squinting down at the ground before her, hoping to avoid any unfortunate tumbles that may occur in the dark.

Draco notices her focus, and silently conjures his Patronus to help light the way. It floats around the pair, keeping them safe.

Hermione's head snaps up the moment she notices the bright white light, a smile spreading across her face as she recognizes the Hebridean Black before her. She conjures her Otter to join the dragon, and the two animals quickly begin to chase each other with delight.

It had been a while since they'd seen one another.

Chapter End Notes

Dr. Flanders is, of course, another reference to the Rights and Wrongs Series by Lovesbitca8!

From Silver to Gold

Chapter Notes

Welcome to a flashback-heavy installment of Draco & Hermione's past!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end (I am forever in your debt).

Thank you to likelyunfinished and peoniesandcedarwood for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Caelus Wood peeks his head into Professor Granger's Class hesitantly. He watches her flourish her wand, animatedly demonstrating the proper technique and enunciation of a charm for seventh-year students. Caelus is still struggling with his levitation charm and suddenly grows anxious about the level of magic he will be expected to perform before he leaves Hogwarts in seven years. Sometimes, Caelus worries he's a squib – and if it weren't for the fact that he's an excellent flyer, he would be certain that he is.

In reality, Caelus is an exceptionally ordinary wizard. He isn't struggling, but he isn't excelling either. The company he keeps makes him feel quite challenged in comparison.

Caelus does his best to keep up with his two friends Elizabeth and Bea, who are constantly fighting for the title of "top of their class" but he has quickly learned that it's usually in his best interest to just partner up with them when possible and pray that he picks something up along the way. Sometimes he feels a glimmer of resentment towards them for excelling at the level that they do, while also being Muggleborn. It's not that he's hateful of their blood status, no Caelus would never think such a thing, his mother is a Muggleborn witch after all.

He simply feels jealous that although they were introduced to this world a few short months ago, everything seems to be coming to them with ease. Caelus had known he was a wizard for as long as he can remember but is still struggling with the more rudimentary aspects of magic. He hopes that things will get easier with time.

"Hello Mister Wood, how may I help you?" asks Professor Granger with a kind smile.

"I'm here to fetch Miss Lupin-Black," he replies quietly. "For the weighing of the wands."

He watches as the girl in the front row starts to pack up her things, whispering to the boy in the seat next to her. He remembers her from the train, and how he'd been scared of her when she'd first poked her head into the compartment. He's now a part of the unofficial Cassie Lupin-Black Fanclub composed of three members, mostly because he'd been worried that if he didn't join, Bea and Eliza wouldn't want to be his friend anymore.

He now knows that that likely wouldn't have happened, but he still worries sometimes that the girls don't actually like him. He thinks that maybe they just feel bad for him because he hasn't been able

to make any other friends so far. One night he even had himself convinced that his father was paying the girls to be his friend.

It's not that the other boys in Gryffindor were mean to him by any means, but Caelus found he had hardly anything in common with them. So, he sticks by Bea and Eliza's sides like glue, despite the teasing he gets from the other boys for only hanging around with witches. His mother had told him in a letter just last week that the boys were likely jealous of him, their teasing a response to this.

He'd gained a bit of confidence since reading this, becoming extra proud every time the two girls would run up to him in the corridors.

"Hi Caelus," Cassie smiles as she looks down at him.

"Hullo," the boy responds, looking down at his feet. He feels very nervous in the Head Girl's presence but is already looking forward to telling Bea and Eliza that he got to walk her to the Weighing of the Wands.

"How are your classes?" the witch asks.

"They're alright," he sighs. "I'm not very good at being a wizard."

Cassie giggles before patting him on the back, "do you want to know a secret?" she whispers.

Caelus nods eagerly at the prospect of Cassie telling *him* a secret.

"When I first came to Hogwarts, I struggled quite a bit as well," she begins. This shocks Caelus, mostly because Cassie seems like the type of witch that was born casting spells. And now, seeing as she was chosen as the Hogwarts champion, Caelus had assumed that she'd always been the best of the best.

"It gets easier with time," she smiles. "One day, it just sort of clicked for me, everything started making sense."

Caelus smiles at this, hoping that maybe this moment will arrive sooner rather than later for him. They walk up to the unused classroom where the weighing is taking place, so Caelus bids Cassie farewell and runs through the corridors, already excited to tell Bea and Eliza of his time with the Head Girl.

"Ah, Miss Lupin-Black, welcome," smiles the blonde wizard. Cassie has to stop herself from rolling her eyes, all too familiar with the kind of wizard that Cormac McClaggen is. He's wearing dark green robes today, with gold stitching around the hem. Cassie believes this to be a rather gaudy way to showcase wealth.

But, she also knows he is the mastermind behind the championship and wants to give off a good impression. "Hello Mr. McClaggen," she says with her best smile, her eyes locked on him. Cassie is well-aware of the fact that wizards enjoy feeling as if they have a witch's full and undivided attention.

The wizard offers a rapacious smile in return, and she almost shivers as she witnesses firsthand the greedy sort of expression she'd heard Hermione describe with a tone of disdain.

Cassie lines up with the other champions, taking time to make eye contact with Mukisa and offering him a smile.

“Firstly, I wanted to congratulate each and every one of you,” McClaggen begins. Cassie notes a fifth-year Hufflepuff take a picture of the scene before them with a muggle camera. She has to stifle a laugh as she remembers the fact that her godmother had been adamant no press whatsoever was allowed on the premises throughout the Championship. So adamant in fact, that it had been a key point of negotiation about the championship happening at all.

In the end, to nobody’s surprise, the wizarding world’s Golden Girl had won the debate, promising that she would put together a team of students in charge of taking photos and writing articles about the championship.

After finding the articles from the last Triwizard tournament, Cassie can’t say that she blames Hermione for wanting the Prophet to stay far away from the students within the castle's walls.

After a long-winded speech from McClaggen that Cassie opts not to listen to, the weighing commences, the extremely handsome Ollivander stepping forward. He beckons Aleksei Petrov towards him, the wizard taking steps forward with his legs moving, and his upper body entirely still. Petrov presents his wand to Ollivander with an outstretched hand and a slight grimace on his face. Cassie understands, she doesn’t like to be without her wand either.

The wandmaker inspects the wand before announcing, “11” long, Yew wood, with a dragon heartstring core, unyielding flexibility.” Cassie attempts to commit this information to memory, hoping to discuss the various wands with her godmother that evening. At first, she’d found Hermione’s fascination with wandlore to be quite uncharacteristic of her. Cassie had always viewed wandmaking as akin to divination but started to realize that there may be some weight to Hermione’s beliefs about the connections between the characteristics of the wand and the witch or wizard who yields it.

Luiz Fernanda steps forward next with a smile. Cassie quickly developed an admiration for the boy, believing him to be a good kind of wizard, but for what reason she is unsure. She’d had a few conversations with him, and so far he seems to be the antithesis of dark magic.

Ollivander declares that his wand is a short 8 ½ inches, and made of Laurelwood, with a Rougarou hair core. Cassie recalls a text she read, listing laurel as a type of wand that cannot perform a dishonourable act. She had never heard of a Rougarou hair core.

Charles Monet is the next to present his wand. It is a longer wand than Cassie had ever seen, a 14 1/2” Maplewood with a Veela hair core and subtle flexibility. She tucks this information in the back of her mind for later perusal.

Mei Sakurai steps forward with such grace that Cassie wonders if there is a featherlight charm on her feet. It is soon declared that her Cherrywood wand possesses a dragon heartstring core and is 12” long. Cassie's mind reels at this information, recalling something Hermione had said about Cherrywood.

“Cherrywood often makes a wand that possesses truly lethal power, whatever the core, but if combined with dragon heartstring, the wand ought never to be teamed with a wizard lacking exceptional self-control and strength of mind.”

Cassie vows to keep an eye on the Japanese witch. Her wand, along with her golden robes signal that the witch is exceptionally powerful.

Nikolai Yankova of Durmstrang presents his Fir wand with a Koralle core to Ollivander hesitantly, his hand lingering for a moment before allowing the wandmaker to inspect it. Cassie knows that Koralle had been used as a wand core only by Gregorovitch. She wonders if this wand had been handed down from an older family member to Yankova.

Caitlyn Jones of Ilvermorny walks forward with her eyes glued on her wand. Ollivander's eyes light up at the sight, his expression almost giddy as he inspects the wand.

"My dear, this is a Hornbeam wand if I am not mistaken?" he asks. The witch only nods in response. "And do I detect a Thunderbird tail feather?" he asks. The witch nods once more.

Cassie attempts to remember anything she knows about either the wood or the core of this wand, but unfortunately, can't seem to recall anything at all. She adds it to her long list of questions to ask Hermione later that evening.

Mukisa Akumu is beckoned forward next, and Cassie perks up as she hears his name. But, as he steps forward, he extends his *arm* instead of a wand.

"Ah yes, Mister Akumu," Ollivander smiles. "You do not use a wand?" he confirms.

"No sir," Mukisa replies simply. Cassie's eyes widen at this, already planning on asking Mukisa to demonstrate his wandless magic.

Cassie can cast a few wandless spells, mostly simple charms or transfiguration spells. But, wandless magic is an exceedingly difficult skill for any witch or wizard that had learned to wield their magic with a wand. She wonders what it would have been like, to never have a wand at all.

She wonders if perhaps she would prefer this, to have the ability for her magic to simply flow out of her finger with ease. It would certainly eliminate the uncomfortable feeling that she experiences when she is without her wand.

Finally, Cassie steps forward with her Sycamore wand with a dragon heartstring core. She'd been eager to read up about her wand, of course, learning that sycamore wood often makes for a questing wand, one eager for a new experience that loses brilliance if engaged in mundane activities. But most importantly, the book on wandlore declared that the sycamore's ideal owner is curious, full of vitality and adventurous tendencies. When paired with such an owner, it demonstrates a capacity to learn and adapt that earns it a rightful place among the world's most highly-prized wand woods.

She had been satisfied with this information, especially because it was paired with a dragon heartstring core.

Next, the champions are all put through a long and tedious half hour of photographs, the fifth-year Hufflepuff conducting individual portraits, and small group combinations before finally putting all eight champions together for one photo.

When posing with Caitlyn and Mei, Cassie offers them both a small smile, hoping to convey that they should stick together as the only witches in the Championship. It's a sort of smile that any witch would understand the meaning of. Mei responds with a smile in return, catching Cassie's meaning almost immediately, while Caitlyn only purses her lips in reply.

At first, Cassie is offended by the witch's lack of smile but soon realizes that it likely wasn't intended to be offensive. Caitlyn's pursed lips remind her of her father's after a full moon. They remind her of the expression he makes when he's in an exceptional amount of pain but doesn't want anyone to worry about him.

She decides to try and reach out to the American Witch when she gets the chance.

During their walk back to Hogwarts a few nights prior, Hermione mentioned that it would be a fantastic academic opportunity for her seventh-year Alchemy students to be able to experience the art of combining the subject with potions. She and Malfoy debated potential lesson plans until they parted ways at the castle and Hermione had rushed to her room to write down the things they'd discussed.

As any good witch or wizard knows, the two areas of study are intrinsically linked, their teachings overlapping in more places than not. Alchemy is a subject that Hermione has always found intriguing, mostly because of its connection to muggle sciences, but even more so because of the way she's able to apply her knowledge from multiple domains of study, all at once.

Alchemy, simply put, is a branch of ancient magic and science that studies the composition, structure and magical properties of the four basic elements, as well as the transmutation of substances. It is thus intimately connected with Potion-making, chemistry, and transformation magic, three of Hermione's favourite topics. Due to the complicated nature of Alchemy, only students who receive either *Outstanding* or *Exceeds Expectations* in all of their classes are permitted to enroll in Alchemy for their sixth and seventh years.

It wasn't until she started her Mastery in Alchemy at Oxford that Hermione realized there is also a connection between what she was studying, and philosophy. Alchemical literature at the Mastery-level is ridden with mystical and metaphysical speculation, and discussions of alchemy as symbolic of a spiritual journey, leading the alchemist from ignorance (base metal) to enlightenment (gold).

She'd found it fascinating to learn about the evolution of Alchemical studies over time, especially when she was able to discuss this with her Muggle parents. At heart, Helen and Richard were scientists as much as they were dentists and found her studies in Alchemy to be fascinating. Because of their knowledge of alchemy as an outdated forerunner of modern chemistry, Hermione was able to discuss her studies with them for the first time in her life. She supposes this is why she'd pursued it to the point that she had, her relationship with the study acting as a tether to both the muggle and magical parts of her soul.

She liked the challenge of Alchemy, the way it forced her to broaden her horizons, and use her critical thinking skills. Alchemy, as it turns out, is largely taught without textbooks, and focuses far more on the exploration of the art. As one of the few muggle-borns to pursue the study at the Mastery-level, she was able to make impressive headway by incorporating Muggle Chemistry into her studies.

Chemistry had evolved exponentially since it had deviated from Alchemy, and Muggle technologies had largely been unused ever since. Hermione had enrolled as a student at Oxford within the Muggle Department of Chemistry as well, eager to create a fusion between the two studies.

Her supervisor, Professor Bates, a world-renowned Alchemist, focused his studies on the link between Potions and Alchemy. His fusion of the two subjects, and willingness to allow her to

experiment with muggle Chemistry, is what caused Hermione to pick him as said supervisor. Truth be told, every single professor within the department had offered to supervise her studies, something which had both excited and annoyed her. On one hand, it was nice to have options and be able to pick whoever best suited her desired studies. However, Hermione detested special treatment of any kind.

She sometimes wished she could change her name and had even considered applying to Programs under Helen Brinson, her mother's maiden name that she had started using when making dinner reservations. While her friends, and Ron especially, were all too eager to use their names to receive special treatment in the form of free Quidditch world cup tickets, expensive dinners at no cost, and free brooms in the latest models – Hermione was not.

Ginny had convinced her at the last minute to apply to schools with her real name, urging her that in the world of Academia, Hermione Granger meant a whole lot more than a *war hero*. Hermione had drawn the line, however, at including Brightest Witch of Our Age as her title.

In the end, the outcome of her applications surprised no one in the slightest. Hermione had received eight acceptances within a week of submitting her applications, letters personally written by the Deans of each school arriving via owl. Each one offered her a place at the school, with added benefits listed in the hopes of convincing the Golden Girl to enroll at their establishment.

While Hermione had obviously applied to Cambridge, Edinburgh, King's College London, Université de Paris, Harvard, Stanford, and Columbia, there was only one school that she desired to attend.

The University of Oxford.

Hermione had eagerly written her acceptance of the offer the moment it had arrived without giving the other schools a second thought. Truthfully, she knows that she could have simply applied to Oxford, but something about applying to only one school felt arrogant and presumptuous, two things that Hermione never wanted to be.

August 25th, 1999, King Street, Oxford

Hermione arrives at her new flat in Oxford on King street with a smile on her face. She takes in a deep breath as she takes in her new space, excited about the endless possibilities before her. She feels more than prepared for both her studies and her arrival in Oxford.

What she isn't prepared for, however, is the arrival of her neighbour across the hall.

Draco Malfoy.

They offer one another a polite nod, both equally surprised to see the other in a place other than Hogwarts. The two had formed somewhat of a relationship during their eighth year at Hogwarts; however, the *type* of relationship differs depending on which of them you ask.

Hermione considers them to have a friendship of sorts, at least the beginning of one. The kind of friendship where you might chat over a cup of coffee every now and then, but never make plans to go to each other's homes.

Draco, on the other hand, believes this to be an acquaintanceship. He knows that he and Granger started talking through circumstance only, and would certainly not be friends outside of the Castle's boundaries.

However, when he sees her curly brown hair and hesitant smile in front of the door across from his own, he wonders if this assessment were true. Are he and Granger... *friends* ?

He decides to follow her lead, not wanting to presume that she cares more about their relationship than she actually does.

Nothing could have shocked the two of them more than this encounter, except perhaps when they both arrive in the Alchemy lab for their first research assistantship, to find that they are not the only student being supervised by Professor Bates.

September 2nd, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

Hermione checks her schedule feverishly, attempting to locate the Alchemy lab. Professor Bates had informed her that you *couldn't miss it* during their floo call the day prior, but she's now wondering if this assessment of his is true.

Finally, she locates the room and casts a spell that shows her she's made it with a minute to spare. She barges into the room, her hair a frazzled mess before coming to a sudden stop.

There, at one of the tables, sits Malfoy, causing her to do a double take. "Are you studying Alchemy as well?" she blurts out in confusion.

The wizard looks up with a confused expression, his eyes widening when he notices who has entered the lab.

"Potions," he replies simply.

"Oh," Hermione replies, suddenly growing worried that she had, in fact, not found the Alchemy lab.

"You're not in the wrong place," Malfoy adds as if he can sense her confusion. "Bates informed me that our collaborative project would be a hybrid of Potions and Alchemy," he explains.

Hermione nods in understanding just as the professor in question enters the room.

"Ah, hello!" he beams. He's a jolly sort of man, with a large belly and a long white beard. He wears half-moon glasses, causing Hermione to compare the man to Dumbledore for a moment. She realizes that this man could very well be Dumbledore *if Dumbledore rode a motorbike*, causing herself to smile.

But, as she glances in Malfoy's direction, she realizes that the similarities are having an entirely different effect on him. She feels pity for the Slytherin, realizing just how awful it must be attempting to move on from your past, just to be reminded of it every day with small moments and triggers.

They discuss their project for the next hour, one that greatly excites Hermione. Together, they will be developing a potion that will cure patients of Dragon's fever, a fever that causes the infected

witch or wizard to feel as if their entire body is on fire.

Hermione had never heard of such a thing and shivers at the idea. Because of the illness's connection to fire, Alchemy is required to find a cure, a knowledge of the four basic elements and the ways to manipulate them an essential asset for the project.

Both Hermione and Draco nod along with no questions as the Professor explains his research, but while Hermione furiously scribes every word the Professor speaks, Draco remains silent and unmoving.

The two of them are dismissed at the end of the hour, Hermione with a spring in her step. Her brain had been sorely underutilized during the summer, and she is more than eager to put it to use once more.

"Did you want to grab a coffee?" she asks, turning to Malfoy suddenly.

"Me?" he asks in confusion.

She smiles, understanding that he may not have expected such an offer. But, the way Hermione sees it, if they're going to be collaborating on a project together for the next two years, and living across the hall from one another, they may as well get to know one another.

"Yes you, Malfoy," she grins.

"Okay," he nods, following her lead.

Hermione weaves through the streets of Oxford with surprising accuracy, and Draco takes a moment to wonder how she seems to know the city so well, having just arrived.

"I've been studying a map of the city for weeks," she says suddenly. Draco worries that she'd been reading his thoughts, and considers throwing up an Occlumency wall. But, before he allows himself to do *the very thing* his Mind Healer had urged him not to, the witch in front of him comes to a halt.

"Here we are," she grins, glancing up at the café in front of them. "Professor Sprout told me about this place," she smiles.

Draco wonders how nice it must be to have Hogwarts professors who want to keep in contact with you, going so far as to recommend a café. "Did she attend Oxford?" he asks with genuine curiosity.

"Yes, in the fifties," smiles Hermione.

The two step inside a cozy space, one with books lined along the walls, and plants hanging in the windows. There are eight tables squeezed into the room, all with mismatched chairs. Hermione grins as she hears the familiar sounds of an espresso machine whirring to life and the barista steaming milk. Light jazz music floats through the room, and a cat lies sunbathing on the table nearest the window.

"Is this a muggle café?" Draco whispers to Hermione, causing her to frown.

"It's not a problem, I've just never been to a place like this," he elaborates, not wanting to upset the witch. He watches as the expression on her face slowly morphs into one of understanding, and almost empathy.

“Yes it is, but it’s all the same,” she explains, “the coffee that is.” Draco only nods, feeling almost nervous about having to place his order. But, he straightens his posture and follows Granger’s lead.

“Hello,” Hermione greets the woman at the counter. “One cappuccino please.”

The barista nods and turns to Draco next, causing him to feel as if his voice is caught in his throat. He stares at the barista as if someone had cast a *Petrificus Totalus* on him.

“He’ll have an Americano,” she adds, noting Draco’s lack of response. He watches as she pays the woman in muggle currency, bewildered by the whole interaction.

“Thank you,” he mutters under his breath, feeling slightly embarrassed by the way he’d acted.

“I know you usually just take your coffee black, so I ordered what I thought you’d like best,” she explains.

“How’d you know that?” he asks, genuinely wondering how Granger knows how he takes his coffee.

“Oh er,” she begins, shifting uncomfortably. “I just noticed one time.”

Draco decides not to pry further, mostly because he actually knows how she takes her tea. He’d never really *tried* to commit it to memory – two spoonfuls of honey and a dash of milk – but had just noticed over time.

He watches in awe as their coffees are prepared, finding it enthralling the way the woman moves behind the bar. It’s as if she’s floating, he thinks. She presses a button that causes ground espresso to come pouring out into a large spoon-like contraption. Draco starts to play a game with himself in his mind, attempting to guess what will happen next.

He’d never given the preparation of his coffee much thought – it had always been brought to him piping hot by a house elf, or arrived on the Slytherin table before him. It greatly confuses him as he watches her press the espresso down with a metal stamp of some kind before clicking it into the machine.

Golden espresso starts to trickle out of the machine and into the mug below, but as this is occurring the woman pours milk into a jug and sticks it under another part of the machine. A loud screeching noise emerges when she does, causing Draco to startle ever-so-slightly. Once the woman is apparently sick of hearing the awful noise, she removes the milk once more and pours it over the fresh espresso. Draco watches in awe as she draws a flower with the milk before placing it on a saucer and sliding it toward Granger.

“How did she do that?” he asks, “the flower?”

Hermione smiles, “it’s just something they do, how they move their wrist I suppose.”

He nods, finding this outing to the café to be far more entertaining than he had anticipated. The woman starts on his next, pouring more espresso into a mug of hot water.

He frowns as the mug is pushed towards him, looking at Granger with a confused expression.

“What’s wrong?” she asks, suddenly worried.

“I didn’t get a picture,” he pouts.

Hermione smiles at this, thinking to herself that Malfoy likely doesn’t realize how childlike his reaction is.

“We can get you a latte or cappuccino next time,” she says, attempting to comfort the upset wizard. He nods, deciding that that is an acceptable plan of action.

They sit at the table by the front window, Hermione in a small wooden chair with a floral cushion, and Draco in a comically large green armchair. Hermione decided to offer him the chair as penance for the lack of a picture in his coffee.

“I’m really very excited about this project,” she smiles, attempting to start some semblance of the conversation.

“Myself as well,” Draco replies.

“I didn’t know you were coming to Oxford,” she continues with a raised brow.

Draco remains silent for a moment, debating how much about himself he should reveal to Granger. He can hear his Mind Healer’s words in his mind, urging him to *open up to people*.

He can’t say he really wants to, but he supposes that’s the whole point. So, he starts small.

“Yes, it’s where my Grandfather attended,” he replies, hoping that’s enough to satisfy the witch’s curiosity.

“Oh, that’s lovely,” she grins, taking a sip of her coffee. A bit of the milk foam remains on her nose, but Draco opts to not tell her – he thinks it looks quite adorable.

“Did he study potions as well?” she asks.

“Yes,” Malfoy replies. “He created the Strong Invigoration Draught while he studied here.”

Hermione’s eyes go wide at this, clearly shocked by this information. “That’s fascinating, why didn’t I know that?” she asks, clearly disturbed by not possessing this one small piece of knowledge.

Malfoy only shrugs in response. “And you Granger? Why Oxford?” he drawls, attempting to come across as uninterested yet polite.

“Well,” she begins with a giggle, “it’s the best isn’t it?”

Draco finds a small smile spreading across his lips at her reply. He should have known that Granger would pick Oxford simply because it’s *the best*.

“Even when I was younger, before I knew I was a witch, I wanted to attend Oxford,” she explains. “It’s always been my dream.”

Hermione can recall the first time she’d visited the school with her parents. They’d taken the train from Hampstead to Oxford. Hermione had enjoyed the entire journey, she’d stared out the window in awe as the train sped along, feeling like a character in one of the books she so loved to read.

When they'd arrived in the ancient city, she could hardly contain her excitement. She'd been all too eager to visit all the colleges, and as many libraries, as they would let her step foot in.

They'd visited the Museum of Natural History, the Bodleian Library, Christ Church, and the Radcliffe camera all before tucking in for a meal at the Turf Tavern. Her parents had allowed her to wander through the streets, happy to let their daughter explore.

Hermione remembers all too well the determination she'd felt, to one-day study at the famed University of Oxford.

Draco and Hermione chat for a half hour longer, discussing all the topics one does when you haven't seen someone in a while. They eventually return their mugs to the woman at the counter and head back into the street, Draco following Hermione's bushy hair once more on the route back to their apartments.

They stand awkwardly at their respective doors when they arrive, clearly unsure of how to part ways.

"See you tomorrow?" Hermione asks.

Draco's heart starts to beat far quicker than necessary, overjoyed at the fact that Granger wants to see him again the next day.

He registers that she must have taken his brief silence as confusion, because she clarifies, "for lab?"

He feels his stomach drop at the realization. "Yeah Granger, tomorrow," he replies with a nod before quickly entering his apartment and shutting the door.

As it happens, Hermione had only clarified because she didn't want Draco to think she was overstepping, or assuming that he would want to spend any time with her outside of the lab. She knows he had likely only agreed to coffee today to be polite.

As she enters her apartment, she kicks her shoes off and releases a large breath. She's confused by the small flutter she feels in her gut, but decides to ignore it.

November 3, 2006, Potions Classroom, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

Draco is unsure why he's so nervous for Granger and her Alchemy students to arrive at his class. He knows all of the students since all of them are also enrolled in his NEWT potions class, but he still seems to be on edge. He'd scourged the class no less than four times, and had organized the ingredients on his shelves twice. He now paces in front of his desk, waiting for the sound of Granger's shoes clicking down the corridor.

When he hears the sound off in the distance, he straightens his posture and smooths his robes. He adjusts his glasses slightly, and leans against his desk with a book, attempting to appear casual.

Truth be told, he reads the same paragraph twice as he waits, not retaining any of the information whatsoever.

Hermione knocks on the door, though it is open, and Cassie notices that she straightens her skirt slightly before entering the room.

“Hello Professor Malfoy,” she smiles as she turns to the eight students filing in behind her. “Professor Malfoy has been kind enough to help me demonstrate the unique art made possible through the fusion of Potions and Alchemy.”

Draco finds himself zoning out slightly as he watches her speak, her hands motioning dramatically around her, something he’s noticed she does when she feels highly passionate about the topic she’s discussing.

She urges the students to gather around the front table where Malfoy had laid out all the necessary ingredients and his own personal cauldron. He’s rehearsed his part three times over, just to assure that he’s prepared.

He draws out the rune of Quintessence on the table with pure salt, before lighting the fire beneath the cauldron. Professor Granger explains the process as he goes through the motions.

He enters into a trance-like state as he does, his hands moving seemingly of their own accord. He lowers the heat and stirs three times in a counterclockwise motion before hovering a small slab of silver over the cauldron, allowing it to rotate slowly in a clockwise motion. The steam emerging from the cauldron begins to surround the silver, enveloping it completely in wisps of translucent grey.

He feels a small bead of sweat gather on his brow as he focuses, not wanting to break his eye contact with the process. He can hear Granger’s voice in the background but doesn’t allow himself to attempt to decipher the individual words she is speaking.

The process he is currently completing is one that takes an exceptional amount of both preparation and talent. The turning of silver to gold, not only in appearance but also in essence, is not a process that can be conducted by any witch or wizard. As a matter of fact, it had taken both Hermione and Draco fifteen times each, to complete the process successfully.

He keeps his wand pointed at the silver, beckoning it to continue turning while Hermione hands him her own wand, just as they had done at Oxford all those years ago.

The vinewood warms in his hand, the sensation sending a jolt of determination through his core. He uses her wand to control the potion, twisting his wrist in a highly precise fashion as the substance rises out of the cauldron and begins to envelop the silver into a sphere, spinning so quickly that it appears to not be spinning at all.

The eight students all watch their Professor in awe, clearly shocked by the act they are witnessing. Cassie, while highly interested in the process, also keeps an eye on Hermione, quite enjoying the way her godmother has her eyes locked on the Potions professor.

Professor Malfoy doesn’t take his eyes off the sphere in front of him as he silently casts a blue flame with his own wand, causing the potion to turn a bright white. With expert precision, he lowers the sphere back into the cauldron, staring over the top of it as he does. The moment the potion touches the base of the cauldron, it evaporates, small flecks of gold emerging into the air around him.

He releases a breath and the stress in his shoulders before carefully levitating a block of gold out of the cauldron and placing it on the table in front of the students.

Suddenly, the room comes back into focus, and he begins to hear the excited murmurs of the students around him. He allows a genuine smile to spread across his face when he notices Granger sporting one of her own. She begins clapping excitedly, all the students following suit.

He hands her wand back to her and she casts the identification charm above the slab of gold, the reading of the substance appearing above it. *100% gold.*

She looks up at him with a grin, clearly impressed. Before today, he'd only managed readings of 98.2% to 99.4%. But, he supposes he always had performed well under pressure.

Hermione had, of course, managed to achieve 100% the first time she'd succeeded at the process, but he hadn't been surprised.

Like calls to like, he'd thought.

Gold calls to gold.

Chapter End Notes

thank you to all of you who have been reading, leaving comments, and engaging with me on TikTok, ily all ♥

Expecto Patronum

Chapter Notes

Well, I hope you like flashbacks & pining Draco!!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end & a huge thank you to peoniesandcedarwood for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bright and early on a crisp November morning, a snowy owl swoops into the Great Hall. It had left the owlery only three minutes prior, two envelopes dutifully attached to its talons. It lands in front of the very tired and disgruntled potions professor, extending its leg toward him with an air of annoyance.

The potions professor rolls his eyes at the owl's attitude and reaches out to remove the envelope. "Help yourself," he says, gesturing to the eggs, bacon, and toast on his plate. The owl hoots and grabs an entire slice of toast, greedily taking off into the air once more.

Draco takes his time opening the envelope, his motions occurring at a glacial pace. He'd gotten up early in the hopes of taking a walk around the grounds before his morning classes, but upon reading the letter he'd received, he knows that he will have no such opportunity.

Professor Malfoy,

You are cordially invited to uphold your end of our bargain and meet me for duelling practice this morning. I'll meet you in the same place as before. The tree has, unfortunately, offended me once more.

Kind regards,

Miss Lupin-Black

P.s. I have been maintaining my end of the bargain, don't you worry.

Draco rolls his eyes for the second time that morning, unsurprised that the petulant owl belongs to the Slytherin witch. However, the postscript catches his eye, causing him to wonder how on earth the Slytherin had been *maintaining* her end of the bargain. Had she said something to Granger? Nothing embarrassing he hopes.

He finishes his breakfast quickly before heading out to the grounds, thankful that he will at least be able to experience some fresh air before locking himself in the dungeons all day.

He casts a warming charm on himself the moment he steps outside, the frosted wind already reaching the insufferable chill it does during the harsh Scottish winters. He ties his Slytherin scarf around his neck, the very same he'd received when he was eleven. The edges are frayed, and the green is now a faded shade, rather than the vibrant emerald it had once been. But, despite his

mother's comments regarding the garment, he refuses to mend it in the slightest. Growing up, he'd cast charms on it, assuring it appeared brand-new to anyone other than him, not wanting to be lumped in with the likes of the Weasleys. Now, however, he is no longer the pompous prat he'd once been and wears the frayed scarf with pride.

The journey around the lake is quite lovely, Draco decides. He's always appreciated the stillness of mornings and their graceful silence. As a child, the only thing that would cause him to rise at such an hour would have been quidditch. Now, he basks in the quiet of these mornings, before the ear-piercing voices of students fill the air.

The remnants of the small amount of snow that had fallen overnight acts as a cushion under his feet, his steps almost imperceptible. As he arrives within a reasonable distance of Cassie, he clears his throat, not wanting to frighten the girl.

She delivers one last devastating blow to the tree in front of her, her technique already substantially improved from their last encounter within the trees. "Hello Professor," she smiles. Draco can deduce the energy behind her smile all too well, realizing that Cassie wields the signature Slytherin smirk almost better than he does. *Almost.*

"Hello, Miss. Lupin-Black," he replies, folding his arms over the top of one another. "Will we once again be firing shots at the poor tree?" he drawls.

"No," she replies, "that's what you're here for." The girl pulls her hair into a bun on the top of her head and straightens her dishevelled robes before placing her feet in what Draco can only assume is a duelling stance.

Wordlessly, he positions himself into a traditional duelling stance, the one he'd been taught from a young age. They bow to one another in silence, a motion that seems to have been adopted worldwide.

"On the count of three," Cassie explains, readying her wand.

One.

Two.

Three.

The second the last syllable leaves her mouth, Draco casts his first spell, a simple *expelliarmus*.

"Been training with my Godfather have you?" Cassie asks with a smirk as she blocks his spell with ease. Then, she pivots on her right foot at a forty-five-degree angle, her body turning in unison as her right arm cuts across her body in a slicing motion.

Draco can feel the energy of her spell as it approaches him, his quick reflexes deflecting it without having to move any part of him other than his wrist. He decides to try and get a rise out of the witch by acting like he isn't trying because truthfully, *he isn't*.

After three blocked spells, and a few half-assed *stupefies* and *expelliarmuses* the witch lets out an exasperated sort of noise. "I'm sorry *Professor*," she snarls, over-enunciating her syllables. "But I believe that our agreement involved you actually helping me train." She raises her eyebrow indignantly.

“Very well,” he smiles, flicking his wand in her direction. He casts three spells in succession, each more complex than the one prior.

The witch stumbles before casting a shield and retaliating. Draco has to admit that she is quite talented, far beyond the skill level of a seventh-year student, that is certain.

She casts two spells of her own, one a binding curse, followed by a stupefy. She smirks as he deflects the second spell at the last second, clearly pleased with herself.

Draco scoffs as he realizes the witch *thinks* just as loudly as her Godmother. Her only upper hand on her opponent being her ability to cast spells wordlessly. So, he employs a technique he’d learnt from his own duelling instructor, Severus Snape.

He prods into the witch’s mind ever-so-slightly. Nothing invasive, of course, but just far enough that he can hear her broadcasted thoughts. Sure enough, she screams her spells in her mind, allowing Draco to know exactly what the witch has planned.

He sends counter-jinxes in her direction at the same moment that she casts her jinx, causing her to furrow her brow in frustration. After twenty more minutes of Draco rendering all her attempts irrelevant, the witch gives up.

Draco stands in silence, allowing the witch time to soothe her bruised ego.

“If I may,” he drawls, “I think our training together would be better spent on mental pursuits.”

The girl’s head snaps up at this, detecting his meaning. “You were reading my mind,” she seethes.

“You needn’t worry,” he adds, channelling his Godfather’s tone as best he can. “I don’t care to see your wistful pubescent thoughts, your mind is surprisingly loud, I hardly had to pry at all.”

Cassie frowns as she stares at him with fire in her eyes.

“Teach me.”

Her response surprises him at first. He’d been expecting far more anger before the inevitable acceptance. “Very well,” he nods.

With the end of the month – and the first task – quickly approaching, Cassie throws herself wholeheartedly into her training and preparations. On top of her upcoming occlumency and legilimency lessons with Professor Malfoy, she also forces Hermione to uphold her agreement to help her train as well.

“Runes, Mione, really?” the witch asks in an exasperated tone.

“Do you want my help or not?” Hermione replies, her eyebrow raised. “This tournament is meant to test your intellect and problem-solving skills, just as much as your spellwork, or whatever you and Malfoy are up to.”

“Actually, Professor Malfoy and I have recently switched gears,” Cassie replies, purposefully leaving details unsaid, knowing her godmother will pry.

“Oh? How so?” Hermione asks.

“Legilimency and Occlumency.”

Hermione gasps at this, “absolutely not!” before standing from her chair. “That is against the rules!”

“Mione, sit down, it's fine,” Cassie urges. “I asked him to!”

Hermione comes to a halt, ceasing her rampage towards the door, no doubt with the intention of confronting Malfoy.

“I want to be as prepared as possible, and if any of the other contestants can use legilimency, I need to know how to protect myself,” Cassie explains.

Hermione releases a breath and stares at her feet before nodding, “I suppose that makes sense,” she says under her breath.

“Yes, it does,” Cassie continues. An idea comes to her in the moment, one that some may consider to be *meddling*, but she decides to try it anyways.

“If it would make you feel better, you can come and observe the first few sessions, to make sure he's being respectful or whatever you're concerned about,” Cassie suggests, attempting to make the proposition seem like it's for Hermione's sake, and not for Cassie's own scheme.

“Yes, I would like that,” agrees Hermione. “Forgive me, but I don't like the idea of Malfoy poking around in your mind.”

Cassie smiles, *hook, line and sinker*, she thinks. “Okay, if that would make you feel better Mione.”

With an agreement reached, Cassie's two-hour-long refresher on ancient runes begins.

A few days later, Cassie's owl lands on Professor Malfoy's plate once again. It begins helping itself to his bacon while it extends its talons in Draco's direction. He huffs as he removes the scroll, eyes widening as he reads the witch's words:

Mione joining us tonight, see you then!

Draco feels the familiar sensation of anxiety start to form in his gut, but he remains unsure as to why this letter has evoked such a reaction. He should have known that the meddling Slytherin would pull a stunt like this. He releases a deep breath and attempts to halt his train of thought before it can take off on its own accord, speeding off into the abyss.

He'd thought that being in Granger's presence again would get easier with time, but after so many years apart, it seems to have become even more difficult, something he'd previously thought to be impossible.

He knows that his childhood *fascination* with the muggleborn witch was most likely much more than that, his mother had assured him of this.

July 1st, 2003, Malfoy Manor

Lucius peers over the top of today's edition of the daily prophet, a rather lovely picture of Hermione Granger at the three broomsticks plastered across the front page with the headline: *GOLDEN GIRL RETURNS TO BRITISH SOIL AT LAST*.

Distracted, Draco attempts to read the corresponding article with squinted eyes, not wanting his parents to know of his interest in the subject.

"Draco, I had a copy delivered to your room this morning, fret not," his mother mentions casually as she sips her tea.

Draco scowls at this, "and why is that mother? If I wanted to receive the prophet, I'd have a subscription."

"I simply thought you may want a copy of this edition in particular," his mother replies with a devilish smile.

Lucius folds the paper dramatically as he peers at his son. "Draco, you can drop this act at once, your mother and I both know of your adolescent infatuation with the Granger girl," he drawls.

"I do not have an infatuation with her," Draco spits, entirely displeased by this conversation.

"Ah, but you do not deny that you once did?" his father confirms.

"I found her interesting, father, that is all," Draco replies, attempting to put a stop to the topic.

"Yes I found your mother quite interesting as well, *Draco*," his father replies with a smirk. "I still do," he adds quickly, noticing his wife's glare.

"Perhaps you should invite her for tea, Draco, now that she's home?" the blonde witch suggests casually, though Draco knows she'd been planning this all morning, likely since the paper had arrived.

"Highly unlikely mother, we haven't spoken since Oxford," Draco replies simply.

"And, might this be due to the fact that you left the witch under the impression that you were to be wedded upon your departure?" his mother asks with a raised brow.

Sometimes Draco detests existing in a family of all Slytherins, everyone is far too calculated and meddlesome. "I'm sure she saw the announcement in the Prophet, when I called it off mother," Draco seethes, "just like everyone else in Wizarding Britain."

"Well, Ms. Granger wasn't in Britain now was she?" his father adds.

Draco rolls his eyes, he knows it's a losing battle when his parents team up against him.

"I'm sure that *Ms. Granger* has better things to do than meet me for tea," he begins, making a point to showcase the use of her proper title, rather than her given name. "She's probably occupied, freeing the house elves, or petitioning for the role of Minister of Magic," he drawls, attempting to lighten the mood.

"Very well, Draco," his mother says with a poised snarl. He's unsure how a snarl can be *poised* in the slightest but leave it to Narcissa Malfoy to figure it out. And execute it flawlessly.

November 13th, 2006, Potions Classroom, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

Draco paces in his Potions Classroom once more, placing a cooling charm on himself as he does. He'd finished his floo call with his Mind Healer not twenty minutes prior, but the assured mindset he'd managed to acquire throughout their session had been dissipating ever since. It's not that he's scared of Granger - no, no matter how menacing Granger tries to look, Draco never finds her frightening whatsoever. What has Draco on edge, rather, is the feeling he can't seem to shake whenever he's in the witch's presence.

Draco takes great pride in being well-put-together, competent, and self-assured. But something about being in the same vicinity as Granger seems to make all of these qualities melt away, leaving only a scared teenage boy in their midst. She's always had that effect on him, truthfully. Her gaze has always made him squirm, rendering him hyper-aware of every inch of his existence. Her presence makes him second-guess his very being, even regarding the most mundane tasks. He has several hypotheses as to why this may be, but he chooses to ignore these possibilities for the time being.

He casts his Patronus as he waits, finding his Dragon to be a great sort of comfort.

November 5th, 1998, The Room of Requirement

"Oh, this is lovely!" Hermione exclaims as she enters the Come-and-Go Room. The space is indistinguishable from the two previous forms Hermione had witnessed: the DA training room and The Room of Hidden Things.

Now, wall-to-wall windows emit slivers of moonlight into the room, illuminating the table in the middle of the space. Hermione walks towards the table curiously, eager to inspect its centrepiece – a cauldron.

"Don't touch that," she hears suddenly, Draco suddenly appearing at her side.

"I wasn't going to," she assures him. "What are you brewing?"

Draco remains silent for a moment, avoiding her gaze. "Just experimenting," he replies, casting protective wards over the cauldron and the ingredients surrounding it.

Hermione mentally catalogues everything she's taken notice of so far.

Flobberworm Mucus, Lavender, Valerian, Jobberknoll feathers, and Sage.

The combination confuses her – initially she believes the ingredients to be for a sleeping potion of sorts. The mucus, lavender, and valerian are all involved in the sleeping draught, though the Wormwood, Powdered Asphodel petals, Sopophorous bean, and Nettle essence are all notably absent.

Her mind begins to spin as she attempts to decipher what Malfoy could be trying to accomplish.

"Granger?" Draco asks, pulling her out of her thoughts. "Shall we?"

She turns to face the two Slytherins with a nod, readying herself.

"This ancient and mysterious Patronus charm conjures a magical guardian, a projection of all your most positive feelings. The Patronus Charm is difficult, and many witches and wizards are unable to produce a full, corporeal Patronus, a guardian which generally takes the shape of the animal with whom they share the deepest affinity. You may suspect, but you will never truly know what form your Patronus will take until you succeed in conjuring it," Hermione begins.

"Yes Granger, I too have read The Standard Book of Spells," Malfoy drawls.

"Honestly Granger, that was impressive," acknowledges Theo, passing a galleon to Malfoy. It is only then that Hermione realizes he has his own copy of the textbook hovering in front of him.

"Were you reading the textbook while I recited it?" she asks in shock.

"Yes, and your frightening accuracy lost me a galleon, unfortunately," the boy replies. She notices Malfoy stifle a laugh.

She rolls her eyes, "I've always found it helpful to understand the theory of a spell before attempting it," she explains.

"Yes, I know, hence why I confidently bet Theo a galleon regarding just that," Malfoy drawls, his arms crossed across his chest.

Hermione rolls her eyes. "Do you want to learn or not?" she asks, cringing slightly as she realizes just how swotty her tone had come across.

The wizards remain silent, which Hermione takes as her cue to continue. "There are two types of Patronuses: corporeal, which means a Patronus with a particular shape and form, and incorporeal Patronuses. Incorporeal Patronuses have no particular shape and do not protect against Dementors the way corporeal Patronuses do."

"Five points to Gryffindor," smirks Theo, trailing his wand across the passage in his textbook. Hermione smiles, despite being well aware of the fact that Theo's comment hadn't been genuine.

"Anyways," she continues, slightly flustered, "this charm will only work if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory."

"Oh yeah, we have plenty of those, eh mate?" jokes Theo, jabbing his friend with his elbow. Hermione is immediately able to decipher that Theo is the type of person to make jokes in an attempt to avoid his feelings. She can't say she blames him, sometimes, she wishes she had this ability.

"Alternatively," she begins, catching the wizards' attention, "one could *imagine* a scenario that would make for a very happy memory."

This catches Draco's attention, he'd already begun fretting over which of his very few *genuinely* happy memories he should pick. There are two that are certainly forerunners, the first time he rode a broom, and when his parents had been given lenient sentences after the war. But neither of those feels strong enough to produce a charm that feeds off of the memory itself. This option, however, seems far more likely to lead him to success.

He still worries that he won't be able to produce a Patronus at all. It's common knowledge that Death Eaters cannot produce one, and while Draco hopes that this fact is linked more to the dark

magic they would wield, rather than the mark on their arms, he still has his doubts.

“Have you picked one?” Hermione asks carefully, glancing in the wizards’ direction.

“I have absolutely zero faith in myself, Granger,” Theo jokes, waving finger guns in her direction.

She raises her eyebrow as she looks at Malfoy, awaiting his confirmation. He only nods.

“Expecto Patronum,” Hermione says assuredly, her otter escaping from the tip of her wand. It dances around her, twisting with delight.

Draco stares longingly at the otter, already wondering what form his Patronus may take – if he manages to cast one at all.

“Here goes nothing,” grins Theo. “Expecto Patronum.”

Hermione finds herself holding her breath, releasing it into a gasp as a thin wisp of silver emerges from Theo’s wand. “Oh Theo, excellent!” she exclaims.

“That was hardly anything Granger” he groans.

“Well it’s better than nothing!” she assures him.

Wanting to get this embarrassment over with, Draco mutters the incantation. He focuses all his energy on his chosen *future-memory*. He envisions his left forearm, bare once more, not even a trace of the snake and skull that had once been there, taunting him.

But, nothing emerges from his wand, not even a spark.

“That’s okay Malfoy,” Hermione smiles, attempting to comfort him. “May I make a suggestion?” The wizards look at her with disgruntled sort of expressions.

“Try meditating, if you can,” she explains. “Sit somewhere comfortable, and focus all your energy on that one singular happy memory, until you feel as if it is all you know.”

Draco perks up at this slightly, his recent research on memories causing him to wonder if he could perhaps place a fake memory within his own mind, one strong enough to allow him to cast a Patronus. But, his mother’s words find him, “*meditation Draco, this is what will strengthen your mental walls, promise me you’ll do it.*”

At the age of fifteen, the idea of meditation had been positively barmy to Draco. But, now he wishes he’d taken this route of Occlumency, instead of the easier, but much more destructive method he’d opted for. His Mind Healer had explained that his nightmares and sleep paralysis are likely a result of the strain he’d put his mind through over the past two years.

Had he taken his mother’s advice, and followed the more holistic, traditional route of guiding the mind into a state of Occlumency, he likely wouldn’t be having all the problems he is today.

Maybe it’s finally time to try this whole meditation thing, he thinks.

Malfoy had meditated every single day over the past week. The first day, he'd only managed two minutes before feeling like he was going insane. The day after that, a minute longer.

By the evening prior, he'd managed a full ten minutes spent in his *happy place*.

By now, he's confident that he'll at least be able to manage a small wisp of silver like Theo had last time. They start immediately, Granger casting her otter once more as a demonstration. The otter twists and twirls around her, bringing a smile to her face.

Theo attempts the spell once again, his silver wisps slightly brighter this time. He grins at this, clearly pleased by his progress.

"Theo," Hermione says suddenly, the boy turning to face her.

"I had an idea, just now," she continues. "I want you to think of the first time you went to the muggle cinema."

"Close your eyes, and focus on your five senses. What does the seat feel like beneath you? What's the temperature like around you? Can you smell the buttery popcorn? Taste it? Now picture the movie, what does the opening song sound like?"

She watches as a grin spreads across Theo's face as he recalls the experience. "Try again," she urges.

"Expecto Patronum," he speaks clearly. A bright white light emerges from his wand, creating a dome-like shape in front of the wizard.

"Bloody hell!" he exclaims, his eyes locked on the brightness of his Patronus.

"Theo!" screeches Hermione, rushing toward him, and pulling him into a hug. "I'm so proud of you!"

She removes herself just as quickly as she'd embraced him, realizing that they may not be at the hugging point of their friendship yet.

Draco suddenly grows very jealous of Theo, and considerably more determined to succeed with his attempt.

"You try mate," smiles Theo, urging his friend.

Draco takes a moment to breathe deeply, allowing his mind to escape into his happy place.

His mind becomes hazy for a split second before sharpening once more, the scene before him twisting like smoke until it resembles the Hogwarts Library. He weaves his way through the shelves towards a small table, tucked at the back by a window. She's sitting at the table, her nose buried in a book, her hair a frazzled mess.

"Granger," he smiles, causing her to turn excitedly toward him.

"Hey you," she grins.

"I have a surprise," he whispers, his arm emerging from behind his back, a pink cupcake in hand. He places it on the table before her, allowing her to take notice of the flavour, and the similarity to

all the years prior.

“Happy Birthday Hermione,” he grins.

“Expecto Patronum,” he says, his voice assured. A white light emerges from his wand, not quite as bright as Theo’s, but a light nonetheless.

“Well done Malfoy!” Hermione grins. Draco feels his stomach drop when she makes no move toward him.

November 17th, 1998, The Room of Requirement

“I think you can manage a corporeal Patronus this time Theo,” Hermione smiles.

“I think so too Granger, I’ve added something to the memory,” he grins, his eyes filled with mischief.

“What’s that?” Hermione asks naively.

“A witch with her mouth on my c-” he begins, causing Hermione to blanch.

“Yes, that’s *lovely* Theodore, thank you,” drawls Draco.

“Whatever works, I suppose,” Hermione laughs nervously.

Theo closes his eyes and takes a deep breath before clearly speaking the incantation. A bright white light emerges from his wand once more, so bright that Hermione finds herself shielding her eyes.

The wizard lowers his wand with a frown, the room darkening once more.

“Theo, may I make another suggestion?” Hermione asks.

“But of course, oh Golden Girl,” Theo bows. She beckons him forward, leaning in to whisper something in his ear. She can recall the longing looks that the wizard had been sending in the direction of, well, *other wizards* throughout the party in the Slytherin common room two weeks prior. “Perhaps, a wizard with his mouth down there?” she whispers.

The wizard jerks back, and for a moment, Hermione worries that she’s overstepped. But, he returns to his usual spot next to Draco and utters the spell once more without hesitation.

Hermione gasps as a figure shoots from Theo’s wand. At first, she thinks it’s a bird of some kind, its wings spread as it soars through the air around the wizard. But, upon closer inspection, Hermione realizes that it isn’t a bird at all.

It’s a Pterodactyl.

Theo seems to realize his Patronus’s form at the same moment as Hermione, releasing an excited *whoop!* as he chases the dinosaur around the room with a gleeful smile on his face.

Hermione grins as she watches his excitement. She’s thrilled about his success obviously, but also the part that she played in it. She turns to face Draco next, who watches Theo with an expression

Hermione can only describe as longing. “You can do it too,” she smiles. “What happy memory are you using?”

Draco stares at her in silence for a moment before remembering himself and plastering a snarl on his face. “Wouldn’t you like to know Granger,” he drawls.

The witch frowns at him, clearly displeased by his reaction. Unphased, Draco decides to take a page out of Theo’s book and amend his happy place ever-so-slightly.

“Happy Birthday Hermione,” he grins.

“Draco, it was you?” she asks, astonished. He nods in reply as she rushes in his direction and leaps into his arms, wrapping her legs around his core. She brings her mouth towards him and places a delicate kiss on his lips.

The smell of honey and strawberries envelops him as he grips her tighter, his fingers tangled in her hair.

She deepens the kiss as he pushes her up against the bookshelf behind them, causing her to gasp for air.

“Expecto Patronum.”

A light even brighter than Theo’s emerges from his wand, the room becoming a haze of radiance. He smiles at the result, though remains disappointed that he hadn’t managed a corporeal Patronus.

“Better,” Hermione smiles, offering him an approving glance.

November 24th, 1998, The Room of Requirement

“Just us today, is it Malfoy?” Hermione asks as she looks up from her book. She’d arrived early but hadn’t managed to have the room appear as Malfoy’s potion lab.

Instead, the room appeared as a near replica of the Hogwarts library.

“What’s this?” Malfoy asks as he gestures to the room around him.

“A Library Malfoy,” Hermione replies with an eye-roll. “I’m sure you’re familiar with the concept.”

While Draco does his hardest to act indifferent to the sudden change of location, it’s an immense struggle. He’d been worried when he’d first entered, having expected his Potions Lab. Instead, he’d found the very setting of his *happy place*. He pinches himself to assure that he isn’t stuck in his head.

“Well, let’s get on with it,” he suggests, hoping to distract the witch from his discomfort. Hermione does indeed notice his discomfort but assumes it’s likely due to the fact that he’s alone with a muggleborn.

“What did you whisper to Theo?” he asks suddenly.

“That’s none of your business,” she retorts.

“It-” he begins, stopping himself. He takes a deep breath, “it just seemed to help, that’s all.”

Hermione’s expression softens, “I simply had him amend his memory, to reflect more closely what would *actually* make him happy.” She hopes that this is helpful enough, without giving anything away. Theo’s preferences are, after all, not hers to share.

Draco ponders this for a moment, re-entering his happy place. This time, however, he’s already seated at the table next to her.

“Happy Birthday Hermione,” he grins.

“You and your cupcakes,” she smiles, taking a comically large bite of the pink baked good.

“There’s something else too,” he adds, allowing his eyes to linger on the bit of icing on her nose.

“Oh?” she asks.

He fetches a small black box from the pocket of his robes and slides it across the table toward her.

Her eyes go wide at the sight before quickly opening the box to reveal a simple silver bracelet inside. Upon closer inspection, she notices that the metal twists into a knot – a lover’s knot with an emerald nestled in the centre.

“Draco!” she exclaims.

He levitates the bracelet toward her wrist and clasps it gently before she tosses her arms around his neck.

She pulls him in for a kiss, releasing him quickly before staring into his eyes. “I love you Draco Malfoy,” she whispers.

“Expecto Patronum.”

Draco leaves his eyes shut, almost dreading his failure. Over time, he’s learned to expect the worst, that way, he’s pleasantly surprised if something good actually happens for once.

Hermione lets out a gasp, causing Draco’s eyes to snap open. The dread in his gut slowly fades, being replaced by a sensation he hadn’t felt in far too long.

Pride.

His Patronus swoops around the room, both chasing, and being chased by the silver otter. A genuine smile spreads across Draco’s face as he takes in the sight, staring in awe at the form that represents his *innermost personality*.

A Hebridean Black dragon.

His smile only widens, however, when a certain curly-haired Gryffindor tosses her arms around him pulling him into a brief hug.

The unique combination of Granger and the practice of Occlumency and Legilimency is what has him particularly on edge today – for reasons he'd rather not discuss at this current time.

The last time he'd been in Granger's head had actually worsened his so-called *fascination* with her – by instilling a false sense of hope within him.

The knock at the door jars his consciousness, alerting him to the presence of the two witches peeking their heads into his classroom.

"Granger," he nods his head respectfully. "Miss Lupin-Black."

Hermione had sworn to be nice to Malfoy throughout this process, assuring herself that the wizard is only trying to *help* Cassie, though his reasoning is still unclear. Something about hearing his signature drawl puts her on edge – as if she'd been transported back to her thirteen-year-old self, her knuckles bruised from punching the blonde prat in the face.

"Malfoy," she begins, crossing her arms over her chest.

Malfoy stiffens, knowing that being on the receiving end of this stance rarely ends well for whoever has managed to annoy Granger.

"May I ask why you plan to riffle through my goddaughter's head?" she demands.

"I do not plan to *riffle*, Granger," he retorts. "I plan to help her build up her mental defences."

Granger only raises her eyebrow at this, remembering all too well Malfoy's *methods* of teaching such a thing. Before she can say anything more, she heads towards Malfoy's desk and takes a seat on the wooden surface, crossing one leg over the other – ready to observe.

Draco balks at the sight of Granger sitting on his desk, momentarily vowing to never scourgify the surface again.

"Ready when you are sir," Cassie smirks. Draco turns to face her with a scowl on his face, he knows for certain now that Cassie is meddling.

"First, you must clear your mind," he begins. "Envision your thoughts and memories as an object of your choosing."

"An object?" Cassie asks, confused.

"Like books," suggests Hermione. "I picture books on shelves."

"You're an Occlumens?" Cassie asks, aghast. "Since when?"

"Malfoy taught me," Hermione shrugs.

"What do you picture?" Cassie asks, turning to Draco once more.

"That's a rather personal question."

"I just need to know what my options are," the witch explains.

“What matters most, is that you have a personal connection to the form you choose for them to take,” he explains, leaning against the table behind him with his arms crossed.

Cassie considers this for a moment, pondering all the objects in her life that actually carry some kind of meaning. “Okay got it,” she smiles.

“Great, and where would you store this object?” Draco asks. She nods to confirm she’s decided on this aspect as well.

“Now, I want you to pull a memory to the front of your mind, preferably a happy one.” Cassie pauses, taking this step quite seriously.

“Picture it as if you’re watching it happen in front of you,” Draco explains. Cassie closes her eyes and follows his instructions. “Now pause it, exactly as it is, and tuck it into whatever object you chose.”

Cassie does just this, picturing the memory like a photograph before folding it gently into quadrants. She nods when this is complete.

“Now store it where it belongs.”

After a few moments, she nods once more. Opening her eyes, she notices that her godmother has her eyes glued on the back of Professor Malfoy’s head.

At this moment, Hermione is thanking Merlin that Malfoy’s teaching techniques have improved since he had taught her. This version seems to be much less painful, that much is certain.

“Now, I’m going to attempt to find this memory, okay?” Malfoy asks.

Cassie begins to nod, but Hermione cuts in to halt the session, demanding “Oral consent Cassie, written if we need to.”

Draco rolls his eyes at this, wondering why Granger feels the need to make him feel like an absolute creep. Hermione on the other hand views this as an excellent opportunity to reinforce the importance of consent for her young and impressionable goddaughter.

“I, Cassie Hope Lupin-Black hereby grant full permission for Professor Malfoy to use Legilimency on me,” the Slytherin witch drawls, knowing that it’s usually the best option to respect Hermione’s wishes.

“May we continue?” Draco asks, a glare aimed in Hermione’s direction.

“You may,” she replies simply, beginning to pick at her nail beds.

Draco begins to form a connection between his mind and Cassie’s, finding himself in a familiar kitchen. He takes a moment to look around, soon recognizing the space as the Lupin-Black cottage. He immediately starts looking for the tell-tale glow of a fresh memory, one that hasn’t been properly concealed. His eyes narrow on a kitchen drawer, and he approaches it slowly, peering inside.

He pauses, praying that Cassie had selected an appropriate memory.

He identifies the source of the glow – a Honeydukes chocolate bar. Below it are countless other bars of various flavours, caramel, sea salt, almond, pecan, coconut, and hazelnut. It seems that they keep their chocolate well stocked at the Lupin-Black cottage, Draco thinks.

He opens the wrapper of the glowing bar and finds a folded photograph. As he carefully pries it open, a scene begins to play before him – a birthday party, it seems. He moves through the memory, surrounded by the telltale wisps of smoke.

Cassie sits at the kitchen table with a grin on her face and a pointed party hat fastened to her head. Behind her are Remus and Sirius, belting some odd rendition of Happy Birthday.

Granger holds the cake out in front of her Goddaughter, a look of pure love and admiration aimed in her direction. Cassie squeezes her eyes shut and blows nine candles out with a gust of air.

Draco removes himself from Cassie's mind and finds himself back in the Potions Lab once more.

"The cake looked delicious," he smirks, alerting Cassie to his success.

Displeased with her failure, Cassie frowns. She hadn't necessarily expected to succeed the first time, but she'd hoped that it would have at least taken Professor Malfoy longer than a few moments to locate her memory.

"Thanks, Mione made it," she smiles. Cassie may or may not have specifically chosen a memory with Hermione in it, with the knowledge that the Professor would more than likely find it.

She already has big plans for which memories to show him next.

Chapter End Notes

as always, I love you all ♥

The Waters of Luck

Chapter Notes

It's Cassie's time to shine!!

I want to thank you all once again for reading my lil story, and leaving comments and kudos - it truly means the world to me xo

Beta love ♡ to whits_end and a huge thank you to likelyunfinished and callcalypso for reading this chapter & providing feedback !!

When the sun rises just after the clock strikes eight on November twenty-fifth, Cassie has to do a double take. She'd been up all night preparing for the first task, despite Hermione's advice that *sleeping* would be a better use of her time than attempting to cram last-minute information into her head.

Meanwhile, Hermione has already been up for three hours by the time the sun breaks over the horizon. She'd scheduled an early floo call with the Department of Magical Games and Sports to review the procedures for that evening, knowing full well that McClaggen would hand the responsibility off to his assistant if the call was before nine.

So, instead of dealing with what is arguably the largest ego in Wizarding Britain, Hermione had a lovely chat with Melody, his new and eager assistant.

However, the hour spent with her head in the floo had done nothing for Hermione's nerves. She's certain that she hasn't felt this anxious since the Horcrux hunt.

Hermione's life has become notably less terrifying since Voldemort's demise, and for that, she is forever thankful. But, over the past few years, she feels like she's lost her ability to deal with stress – *real* stress. She's more than able to manage her workload and everything that comes with the various roles she fills. The prospect of sending her goddaughter into a literal death trap later that evening, however, has Hermione understandably on edge.

She meanders through the corridors towards the Great Hall, determined to consume some kind of food. She knows an empty stomach will only worsen the feeling of dread in her gut, but as she picks away at her scrambled eggs, she realizes she has no appetite whatsoever.

She silently butters two slices of toast and nibbles away at them, observing the students below. Many of the Ravenclaws are hunched over various books and bits of parchment, scribbling away as if their lives depend on it. The Hufflepuffs share laughs with their housemates as one boy attempts to fit as many sausages as possible in his mouth. The Gryffindors animatedly discuss the first task, shouting across the table at one another as they attempt to guess what it could be. The Slytherins sit in small groups along the length of their table, sharing hushed whispers with one another.

Cassie makes her way into the hall, her hair a mess, and her face sunken. Hermione can tell immediately that her goddaughter had not heeded her advice in the slightest. She allows Cassie a quarter of an hour with her friends before marching over to the Slytherin table with a displeased look on her face. Many of the students look at her with fright in their eyes, their rigid postures only relaxing once she's passed them.

She comes to a halt behind Cassie and clears her throat, the Slytherin slowly turning towards her. It's rare that Hermione engages with Cassie in such a way, typically liking to keep their *familial* relations separate.

"Miss Lupin-Black," she says with a pointed tone, "come with me." Cassie obliges, albeit reluctantly, groaning internally as she follows her godmother.

The minute they've left the Great Hall, Cassie opens her mouth to speak but quickly snaps it shut when Hermione sends a glare in her direction. They walk in silence toward the dungeons, and it isn't until they arrive at Professor Malfoy's office that Cassie has any idea what Hermione's intentions could be.

Hermione knocks aggressively on the door and takes a step back, waiting with her arms crossed. As the door swings open, a very sleepy and confused Malfoy stares at the pair. For a moment, he worries that he's forgotten about an Occlumency lesson, but based on the expression on Granger's face, it's clear he's not the one in trouble today.

Hermione abandons all decorum as she barges into his office and gestures for Cassie to follow. She wandlessly slams the door shut before turning her body towards the Slytherin witch with a disappointed stare. Draco takes two careful steps back, not wanting to be caught in the crossfire of whatever *this* is.

"Malfoy, a pepper-up potion, if you please," Hermione orders, not bothering to so much as glance in his direction. Draco hurries toward his storeroom, happy to have an excuse to be far, far away from the mounting tension. He hears Granger cast a silencing charm and braces himself for impact, thankful that for once, he isn't on the receiving end of one of her infamous scoldings.

"Cassandra Lupin-Black!"

"Yes?"

"Are you not taking this seriously? You need your wits about you for this championship! People have DIED!"

"I am taking it seriously, Mione—I lost track of time!"

"Your fathers do NOT need to lose anyone else in their lives, nor do I."

"Mione, nothing bad is going to happen to me!"

"You don't know that Cassie, these tasks—they're awful, they're barbaric."

"And I'm prepared for that, Hermione, one slip-up doesn't mean I'm going to DIE!"

"One slip-up could be the difference between life and certain death, Cassandra. I don't think you truly have a grasp on -"

“You can’t order me around, Hermione!”

“I’M SORRY. What did you just say to me?”

“MALFOY!?”

Draco hurries back into his office, a pepper-up potion in hand. He shoves it in Cassie’s direction, backing up like a coward the moment the witch accepts the vial.

She tosses the potion back without blinking an eye before yelling, “HAPPY NOW?” in Hermione’s direction.

“No, I’m not happy!” Hermione shouts back, suddenly pulling Cassie into a tight hug.

Draco watches in confusion as they embrace, whispering apologies into each other's hair. He truly believes that he’ll never fully understand witches – not two minutes ago he could have sworn hexes were going to fly.

“I know you’re just worried, Mione, but I promise, I’m prepared,” smiles Cassie. “Ask Professor Malfoy,” she adds, glancing in his direction. Draco remains still and silent, determined to keep the attention off of his person. He couldn’t be sure he wouldn’t be hit with a bat-bogey, regardless of the apparent truce.

“We’ve been practicing every night for the past two weeks, I can hide memories from even him now, my mental walls are strong.”

The two Slytherins had certainly been practicing, though the exercises had been serving somewhat of a dual purpose. Cassie was improving at an alarming speed, the art of Occlumency already like second nature to her, even Draco had been shocked.

But Cassie had been having far too much fun curating the list of memories to show Malfoy, each one with a specific purpose in mind. Logically, the first memory she’d shown him was her first memory of Hermione.

The witch had stepped through the floo with a smile on her face, eager to meet her goddaughter. Her expression had quickly shifted to one of pure adoration with a hint of protectiveness the minute she’d laid eyes on the eight-year-old.

She’d squatted down to be at eye level with the girl before extending her hand toward her. “Hello Cassie, I’m Hermione, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” she’d smiled.

Truthfully, Cassie had fallen in love with the witch at that very moment and felt safe in her presence from there on out. Cassie believes that Hermione emanates a kind energy that makes you feel wholly loved, makes you feel at home. She’d wanted Professor Malfoy to witness this in the hopes it would help him remember just how loving Hermione can be.

He’d remained silent for a moment after he left her mind. She thought she saw a flash of emotion on his face before he remembered himself and congratulated Cassie for concealing the memory better than her previous attempt.

The next memory Cassie mainly chose because she wanted a laugh – the day she’d gotten her first period.

It was during the summer after second year, when she'd convinced herself that she was dying. If Cassie knew one thing, it was that blood is *never* a good sign. Her fathers had been quite frazzled when she'd run to them crying, complaining of a pain in her abdomen. Remus had frantically floo'd Hermione the minute they identified the source of Cassie's pain.

Hermione, coincidentally, was home that week visiting with her freshly un-obliviated parents. But this hadn't stopped her from taking an hour out of her day to come and comfort the young witch. She'd diligently taught Cassie all the charms she'd learned over the years to help with menstrual pain; and a charm of her own creation that acts as the magical version of a tampon.

After instructing Remus and Sirius to treat Cassie to whatever sweets she desired, and tend to her every need, she hugged Cassie and departed through the floo once more.

Draco had drawn out of her mind with a slight grimace this time, but surprisingly, made no comment about Cassie's selection of memory. Cassie had found this odd, mostly because every other wizard she knew would suddenly be rendered squeamish at even the smallest mention of a witch's menstruation.

The rest of the memories Cassie opted to share all involved Hermione in some capacity, but she wasn't evil enough to show Professor Malfoy anything about *him*. Hermione had revealed quite a bit about her history with the Slytherin to Cassie, likely because she never anticipated that Cassie would meet him in any capacity, let alone have him as her professor.

Interestingly, the Professor never made any comments about the pattern of her memories, or rather the chosen subject. In fact, he seems to enjoy watching these memories, treating the exercise as almost a treasure hunt - Hermione's glowing smile the chest of gold at the end of the quest.

So, by the end of their crash course in Occlumency, Cassie knows one thing for certain.

Professor Malfoy is absolutely, without a doubt, still in love with Hermione Granger.

After taking a nap to appease Hermione and a trip to the Prefect's bath, Cassie feels much more like herself. She twists her hair into two plaits and applies her usual everyday makeup, wanting to look her best during the task - it is being broadcasted after all.

As it turns out, the ICWC had received a substantial amount of funding from multiple sources. Because of the inclusion of Wizarding Schools outside of Europe, the Ministries of all the countries involved allocated funds to the Championship.

The development of the Wizarding Broadcast Service (WBS) had gained popularity over the past few years – the wizarding equivalent to Muggle TV. By casting a simple charm, the Broadcast will appear before whichever witch or wizard wishes to watch. However, unlike muggle television, the broadcast can be rendered three-dimensional, allowing the viewer to experience the action first-hand without having to leave their homes.

Typically, the Broadcast is filled with news segments about various topics of interest, from politics to sports and society gossip. Advertisements had also started to make their way into the mix. The jingle for Sleakeezy's plays often and gets stuck in many wizards' heads.

The WBS had been all too eager to cover the Championship, with companies equally willing to pay a substantial amount of galleons to have their advertisements run during the event.

Hermione had been wholeheartedly against the WBS having access to the tasks, deeming it *exploitative*. After her experience during the Triwizard tournament, the idea of having any form of press near her students makes her furious. She had been unfortunately outvoted due to the fact that the investors were only willing to do so *if* the event was broadcasted. So she chooses to find solace in the fact that the press isn't allowed within the Hogwarts grounds – a small, yet essential victory.

Satisfied with her appearance, Cassie winds her way through the corridors from the dungeons to Headmistress McGonagall's office where all the champions are to meet. All eight champions file in one after the other, their expressions ranging from genuine fear to practiced indifference. They are each given a silver ring, a portkey that will transport them to the site of the first task, the location unknown.

As the clock strikes the hour, all eight champions are whisked away from the Headmistress's office. McGonagall releases an exasperated breath and rubs her temples before taking off at a brisk pace toward the Great Hall.

The tasks this year had been kept secret, *a genuine secret*. There were no whispers of what they could be or even the range of skills the champions may be required to use. Every single member of the Department of Magical Games and Sports had taken a Wizard's Oath, meaning that even their family members hadn't a clue as to what the tasks could be.

This had only added to Hermione's anxiety surrounding the event – she'd never been a fan of unpreparedness, especially when her loved ones are involved.

When Harry had been in the Triwizard Tournament all those years ago, she'd been able to help him research each task, even the first one which was supposed to be kept a secret. They'd planned and prepared, with multiple backup plans in place. She'd been able to maintain a certain level of sanity throughout the process, knowing that they'd done all they could to ensure Harry's safety.

This time, Hermione feels helpless, because while she and Malfoy had done their best to ensure Cassie's safety, they also had no idea what kind of forces they were preparing her to go up against.

She anxiously paces the length of the Great Hall as she keeps an eye on the Broadcast behind her. The sheer size of the Broadcast reminds her of a Muggle cinema, large enough for every witch and wizard within the hall to be fully immersed in the task.

This similarity is only strengthened by the comfortable seating that has replaced the house tables for this viewing. The students chat excitedly with one another, passing large buckets of popcorn and sweets from Honeydukes through the aisles.

Eventually, Hermione takes her seat between Remus and Malfoy and begins to bite her nails.

As Cassie stares up at the stone wall before her, the confidence she had been feeling only minutes prior starts to wane. The wall is tall, so tall that she has no idea what could be on the other side. There is a single section of the monolith that is missing, the entrance, she assumes. She glances at her fellow champions, all of them appearing equally confused.

A witch from the Department of Magical Games and Sports walks down the line of champions, transfiguring their clothing into a uniform of sorts. Each champion now sports comfortable, water-resistant pants, a thin long-sleeve shirt in their school's official colours and a pair of dragonhide

gloves. Cassie detests Hogwarts' burgundy, finding that it does not compliment her skin tone in the slightest, but decides now isn't the time to complain.

Fifteen minutes before the task is set to begin, McClaggen saunters toward the group, his bright blue robes billowing behind him. "Gather around," he beckons.

The champions form a semi-circle in front of him, their confused expressions shifting into various states of anxiousness. While Cassie picks at her nail beds, she observes the physical manifestations of their nerves. Luiz kicks the soil beneath his feet while Mukisa wrings his hands together, no doubt feeling his magic at his fingertips. Caitlyn stares straight ahead, her expression blank.

"This task is simple," Cormac begins.

Sure it is, Cassie groans internally.

"This, behind me," he gestures, "is a maze. The maze is *alive* for all intents and purposes, and houses countless obstacles that you must overcome. Your goal is simple: find the exit."

The Maze

At the sound of a whistle, each contestant enters the maze in the order that the Goblet of Fire spit out their names which, of course, upsets Cassie greatly.

After the seven contestants before her have entered, she steps into the maze. The temperature around her drops instantly, likely due to the sheer lack of sun present within the smooth stone walls. She casts a simple warming charm on herself before continuing, keeping her senses alert all the while.

She realizes how silent it is, the lack of noise jarring. It's so quiet, that she actually wonders if there's a charm placed over the maze to render the champions deaf. She knocks on the wall next to her to test the theory and is relieved when she can hear the sound of her knuckles against the stone.

She attempts to devise a plan of some kind: should she attempt paths at random? Or keep moving in one singular direction? Should she go for speed or stealth?

In the end, she decides to trust her intuition, it's never led her astray so far.

She reaches a fork in her path and takes a moment to look into her three options. Unfortunately, each path is the same: empty. She decides to go left, praying that this was the correct choice. After several minutes, Cassie grows anxious. Why hadn't she reached any obstacles yet? How big is this maze?

The Great Hall

The broadcast is causing Hermione's anxiety to reach an all-time high. While she's glad she can keep an eye on Cassie, being aware of how close her goddaughter is to obstacles without the ability to help her is Hermione's own personal version of hell.

She holds Remus's hand tightly as she observes the broadcast. On the left are eight sections – one for each champion. Hermione has to admit that the Broadcast is impressive, a magical feat. Each

section follows its assigned Champion with ease as if the entire maze is built of cameras. To the right, is a map of the maze. That view had appeared the second the whistle was blown.

Each champion is represented as a blinking dot, along with a large red X for each obstacle. The only information missing is what the obstacle actually is.

The Maze

After wandering around aimlessly, Cassie approaches the table made of stone with extreme caution. Past the table is a glimmering barrier, one Cassie knows she shouldn't attempt to walk through, not yet at least. On the table are ten glass vials of what appears to be Shrivelfigs, and one single bubbling cauldron.

Words begin to etch themselves into the stone of the table, it reads:

A poison I am, unless rendered void.

Ten choices before you, similar in sight.

The needed quantity resides in only one.

The scale before you can be used no more than once.

Authenticity outweighs falsehoods by only 0.1 grams.

Add your solution and consume the truth.

Succeed, and you may pass.

Cassie rubs her eyes as she re-reads the passage once more. Honestly, she thinks she would prefer fighting a manticore to this.

She turns back, opting to choose another path. But, the same barrier behind the table, now blocks her in, forbidding her escape.

She releases a frustrated breath and turns reluctantly towards the table. She decides to recite what she knows so far, finding that talking through her problems has always been the best way to approach them.

"Okay, a poison I am, unless rendered void," she glances at the bubbling cauldron. That one's obvious enough, she decides.

Next, she begins to examine each of the vials. Each of them contains the same amount of Shrivelfigs, ten to be exact. "Ten choices before you, similar in sight," she recites, as she crosses this line off of her mental list.

"The needed quantity resides in only one," she whispers, her mind spinning. "A poison I am, unless rendered void."

She nods, "Okay so only one of these vials contains real Shrivelfigs."

She begins to pick the vials up at random, hoping that one of them will feel slightly different than the others. But, of course, she has no such luck.

“Authenticity outweighs falsehoods by only 0.1 grams,” she mutters. “Okay, so one of these weighs more than the others..”

“The scale before you can be used no more than once,” she glances at the scale, narrowing her eyes in its direction.

“Add your solution and consume the truth. Succeed, and you may pass.”

She releases a frustrated breath, realizing what needs to happen. Somehow, while only using the scale one single time, she has to determine which of the vials weighs more than the others. Once determined, this vial will then need to be added to the cauldron in front of her, thereby rendering the poison safe to drink.

If she chooses the wrong vial, the poison will, well, remain a poison.

If she does nothing at all, she will remain stuck, unable to move on.

Before she continues, she decides to get the easy options out of the way. First, she casts an identification charm over each vial – one that should tell her what the substance is.

But, just as she’d suspected, the charm fizzles out, no identification appearing in front of her. “Of course,” she mutters under her breath.

“A methodological approach it is,” she curses as she arranges the vials in a straight line in front of her. She notes that all the Shrivelfigs are identical in size, and grows thankful that their uniforms for the task includes gloves.

She can practically hear Professor Malfoy’s warning tone, “cross-contamination is the number one leading cause of potion-related deaths.”

She inspects one singular Shrivelfig from each vial. She opens one at a time and replaces each one before the next, not wanting to get them mixed up. Sure enough, they all look authentic.

“Looks like we’re doing arithmancy, folks!” She cheers sarcastically. Cassie detests Arithmancy, but is, of course, still enrolled in the course at a NEWT level.

Tossing her hair over her shoulder, she gets to work.

“Okay, ten vials, each with ten Shrivelfigs,” she mutters. “Let’s say they all weigh about a gram, that would mean that the total weight should be 100 grams if I were to put them all on the scale at once.”

“But, if I place them all on the scale to get their total weight, to divide by ten, then I’ve used my one attempt,” she curses.

“Okay, okay, okay,” she paces, staring at the vials.

After several moments spent running through options in her head, everything suddenly clicks into place – she needs to render each vial distinguishable from one another before weighing them all together.

She diligently removes one single shrivelfig from the first vial and places it directly behind it. She then removes two Shrivelfigs from the second vial and continues with this pattern until she pours all ten Shrivelfigs out of the last vial.

“Okay, so, now if I place all the vials on the scale, there will be....” she pauses for a moment, calculating in her head.

“Ten vials, ten Shrivelfigs, that’s one hundred, but divide that by two since I’m removing half of the Shrivelfigs...” she mumbles to herself. “So the weight should be fifty grams if I place them on the scale. But, the derivation from fifty will tell me which bottle contains the heavier pills, right?” she asks no one but herself. “Yes because they weigh only 0.1 grams more,” she nods, assuring herself.

“So, for example, if they all weigh 50.4 grams, that would mean that it’s vial four that weighs more,” she elaborates, mostly for her own benefit.

She takes a moment to pause and inspect the vials, and stare at the poison once more. She’s almost certain that this is the only way to solve this dilemma. So, without further ado, she levitates all ten vials toward the scale and lowers them all at the same time. She holds her breath as the scale settles, the golden number 50.8 hovering overhead.

“I did it!” she exclaims excitedly, quickly replacing all the Shrivelfigs into the eighth vial. Without pausing to second guess herself, she pours the contents of the vial into the cauldron, praying to Merlin that this works.

Suddenly, the potion begins to bubble, transitioning from a dark ink-like black to a shimmering lilac colour. She releases a steady breath before siphoning some of the potions into the now-empty vial. Surely she doesn’t need to consume the entire cauldron?

“Cheers,” she smiles as she tosses the potion back without a grimace. Not wanting to delay herself any further, she walks carefully towards the translucent barrier. Half of her wants to take off at a run and barrel through it, but her other half, which is much more concerned with self-preservation, convinces her to stick her pinky forward first.

The finger passes through without so much as a tickle, causing her to grin.

She charges through the barrier, only taking a short second to glance back and witness the table rearranging itself, the potion returning black once more.

The Great Hall

Hermione releases the breath she’d been holding ever since Cassie had drunk the potion. She allows her shoulders to deflate and releases the hand she’d been gripping onto for dear life.

Wait.

She turns to look at the hand in question, finding it connected to a highly amused Potions professor.

“Sorry,” she mumbles under her breath, suddenly embarrassed.

“No need to apologize,” he replies without taking his eyes off of the broadcast. “She’s doing great, see?”

Hermione follows his gaze, noticing the Durmstrang champion currently battling Devil’s snare. *Rookie mistake* , she thinks.

The other champions are all equally occupied, Hermione realizes. Her eyes had been glued on Cassie’s section of the broadcast from the moment she’d entered the maze.

Her knee bounces up and down as she glances at Remus. Cassie’s father sits stone-faced, his eyes unmoving. “She’s going to be okay, don’t worry,” Hermione smiles, attempting to comfort herself just as much as Remus.

“I’m worried about Sirius,” Remus whispers. “He’ll be working himself into a fit at home.”

“Don’t worry, I sent Ginny and Harry over to keep an eye on him,” the witch assures him.

Remus turns to face her with a look that can only be described as admiration. “What would we do without you, Hermione?” he smiles.

The Maze

Just when Cassie starts to think that this task is far too easy, the walls start to move.

At first, she’s worried that she’s hallucinating. But, as the unmistakable noise of the stone walls shifting pierces the air, she begins to run. She doesn’t care in what direction, or where she’s headed.

She sprints as fast as she possibly can, her feet pounding against the ground beneath her, looking frantically around her for an escape. She takes a sharp left that appears seemingly out of nowhere and falls to the ground as she attempts to catch her breath.

The wall behind her seals itself once more, the passage she had just come from disappearing into nothingness. She takes in her surroundings, finding herself in a clearing of sorts. In the middle of the space is a fountain, with a statue of Morgana standing proudly in the centre. She makes her way towards it, eager to splash her face with cold water.

She approaches the edge of the fountain and peers into the water, reeling back at the sight that she sees. She slowly moves toward the water once more, this time prepared to see the wrinkled face once more.

It’s a peculiar feeling, to look into something that should show your reflection, to be met with, well, *anything else* .

She makes eye contact with what she can only describe as a Hag. “Hello, deary,” she hears suddenly, the voice as clear as day.

“Er, hello?” she replies, attempting to remain calm.

“Lost, are you?” the Hag asks with a sneer.

“Why would I be lost?” Cassie asks, confused.

“Well, there’s no way out, is there deary?” the Hag chuckles.

Cassie takes a moment to look at the wall surrounding her, finding that the Hag is, unfortunately, correct. “I’m just going to have a drink of water, then I’ll investigate,” explains Cassie, reaching her hand towards the water.

“Not so fast, girly,” the Hag jeers. Cassie watches in horror as the water passes through her hand as if it isn’t there at all. She tries again, her eyes widening as the water turns to smoke.

“I can make you a deal,” the Hag begins, her eyes twinkling. Now, Cassie had been told enough stories as a child to know that you should never make a deal with an unknown Hag, but she ponders this offer for a moment.

“What’s the deal?” she asks curiously.

“I won’t tell you, not until you agree,” the Hag laughs.

“Merlin,” Cassie mutters under her breath. She stands and decides to exhaust all her options before returning to the Hag. She wanders around the edge of the clearing, dragging her hand across the stone, feeling for any inconsistencies. But, after she arrives where she’d started, she decides that the Hag is, unfortunately, her best option.

“Welcome back, deary,” the Hag smiles wickedly. “Are you ready to make a deal?”

“Why the hell not,” Cassie replies, unamused.

“That’s the spirit. Are you familiar with the potion Felix Felicis, deary?” the Hag asks. Cassie only nods in reply.

“This potion was created by Zygmunt Budge in the sixteenth century after a visit to the Fountain of Morgana,” the Hag begins. “He’d drunk from the waters below, and found that all of his endeavours succeeded that same day.”

“Is this a history lesson?” Cassie asks, her tone impatient.

“Patience, deary,” the Hag cackles.

“Now, I’d like to give you an opportunity to drink from this fountain.” Cassie considers this, surely there’s a catch?

“As the sworn protector of the fountain, however, I can’t simply let just anyone drink from the waters of luck.”

“The person must be worthy – worthy of the blessing of Morgana,” the Hag’s eyes twinkle.

“Okay, and how do I prove my worth?” Cassie asks.

“Three simple riddles,” the Hag grins. Cassie groans at this, she hadn’t been placed in Ravenclaw for a reason. She likes logic, things that are clear and concise – not obscure riddles.

“Fine, let’s do it.”

“You tell it not to come, but it still comes. You tell it not to go, but it still goes. What is it?”

Cassie takes a seat on the ground, knowing that this will likely take a while. At first, she considers the riddle at a surface level, brainstorming various objects or things that can come and go. She chuckles, when she considers replying to the riddle with *a disobedient dog*, thinking of her dad.

She tries to channel her inner Ravenclaw, in an attempt to think in a more abstract way. Clearly, it's something that we have no control over, meaning it's not man-made, she reasons. The tide? After all, the moon's pull is what controls the tide, not humans.

But that doesn't seem right, she decides – it needs to be something that we don't want to come or go. Something we wish we could control, to allow ourselves to have more or less time with whatever it is.

Time.

Time.

That's it.

"Time," she smiles, peering back into the water.

"Very good," the Hag coos.

"What is always in front of you but cannot be seen?"

Cassie takes a seat once more, feeling much more confident after her initial success. She tries to take as abstract of an approach as possible.

There isn't much that's *always* in front of you, she thinks. What you're facing is constantly changing.

"Stop thinking so literally," she scolds herself. "We move forward, we walk forward... But what is always in front of you?"

"Your future is always before you Miss Lupin-Black, all you must do is reach out and grab it."

At first, Cassie had thought her Divination teacher to be barmy, but now, she thanked Morgana herself that she'd paid attention during that crystal ball lesson.

"The future," she utters under her breath.

"What's that deary?" she hears from inside the fountain.

"The future," she repeats, this time with confidence.

"Quite right," the Hag replies.

"What can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?"

"Okay, things that are breakable," Cassie mutters as she begins to pace.

"A broken heart?" she wonders. That could be it, she thinks. But something in her gut tells her that's not the answer. *Time*, and *the future*, are both much more abstract ideas, nothing tangible like a heart.

Her mind begins to hear words, the utterance bouncing around like an echo, *“I don’t break promises, Cassie, not anymore.”*

She can practically hear Sirius speaking these words, his face crestfallen with guilt. “A promise,” she answers quickly, staring into the eyes of the Hag.

“Right you are deary,” the Hag smiles, her reflection disappearing from the water entirely. Cassie dips her hand into the water once more, finding that this time, she can actually touch it. She scoops the liquid and pours it into her mouth, consuming a good few gulps.

The Great Hall

Hermione returns to her seat after scolding a group of Ravenclaws who had taken it upon themselves to yell the answers to the riddle at the broadcast. She’d stormed toward them with an expression of fury, their jeering quickly turning to silence.

“Look,” Draco points. Hermione follows the direction of his finger, realizing how close Cassie is to the exit of the maze.

“She’s so close,” she whispers.

“Let’s hope the waters of luck can get her there,” smiles Draco. He reaches for her hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

He quickly realizes what he’s done, his instinct to reach out and comfort her overriding his better judgement. He holds his breath, awaiting her reaction.

Hermione is equally as shocked but finds that such a small gesture has actually helped to calm her nerves substantially. The sensation of his hand on hers is familiar and soothes an ache she hadn’t realized existed, warmth beginning to spread from where his skin comes into contact with hers.

She’d missed this feeling.

From his rigid posture, she can decipher quite easily that he’d only considered the implications of his action after the fact. She rubs her thumb along the back of his hand as reassurance, a silent message that she’s not bothered in the slightest.

The Maze

Cassie feels great, fantastic even. She decides that the waters of luck are better than any drug or alcohol she’s ever tried. She feels self-assured, joyful, and determined as she stands and takes off with purpose. She heads toward a very specific section of the wall. Why? She has no idea, it just feels right.

She extends her arm and places her palm against the cool stone, the wall suddenly shifting backwards, creating a path. She momentarily worries that she’ll be blocked in, but some unknown force assures her that won’t happen.

After following this new path for several minutes, it finally opens at a fork. Three new routes stand before her, and without hesitation, she chooses the left-most option.

A scream pierces the air, causing her to halt. At first, her brain tells her to keep going, to ignore the noise completely. But, a split second later, her path is modified, causing her to pivot toward the noise. She tiptoes, wand at the ready. But when she finds Caitlyn Jones cowering in a ball on the ground, there appears to be no threat in sight.

“Caitlyn? Caitlyn? Are you okay? Can you hear me?” she asks. The girl continues to sob hysterically, curled in a ball, clearly oblivious to her surroundings.

Cassie gently places a hand on the girl's shoulder, hoping that establishing contact may help pull the witch out of her panic. The second her skin comes into contact with Caitlyn's, she thrashes back, eyes wide.

“Please stop, don't,” the girl sobs, staring at Cassie as if she's her worst nightmare.

“Hey, hey I'm not going to hurt you, I promise,” Cassie assures the girl, attempting to replicate her father's kind tone. “What's wrong?” she asks.

In the back of her mind, a small worry starts to form. Is she wasting her time right now? Shouldn't she just leave the girl and continue on? But, something in her gut tells her to stay. So, she does.

“I see them everywhere, the dementors,” the girl sobs. “All I can feel is darkness, everything hurts.”

After a brief glance to assure herself that there are in fact, no dementors, Cassie knows immediately what she needs to do.

When she was first adopted all those years ago, Cassie had suffered from awful nightmares. They'd been so bad, that she would often find herself in a state of sleep paralysis, unable to move. She'd woken her fathers with a scream every single night during her first month with them.

But, instead of being upset with her in the slightest, the pair had put a plan into place. As they tucked her into sleep each night, one of them would cast their Patronus. Her father's wolf or her dad's scruffy dog would guard her all night long, protecting her from her own nightmares.

The wispy white light had made her feel safe, its mere presence managed to convince her brain that for the first time, perhaps ever, she was safe.

“Expecto Patronum,” she says, her black cat shooting out of the end of her wand. The cat immediately starts to prowl around the sobbing witch, nudging her gently.

Slowly, her sobs stop, and her pupils shrink. Her breathing settles, and she sits up. “Oh my god,” she breathes. “I felt like I was dying.”

Then, the blonde witch tips her head back and *laughs* .

“Thanks, by the way, for helping me,” she adds.

“Of course,” Cassie smiles, offering her hand to the witch. She helps her up and gives her a moment to collect herself.

“Come on, I know where we need to go,” Cassie explains.

“You *know* ?” the girl asks.

“Yeah, I sort of drank this water that’s like Felix Felicis on crack,” Cassie jokes.

“Lucky you, I drank a potion that made me hallucinate,” Caitlyn replies.

Cassie leads the way, taking turns seemingly at random. Caitlyn doesn’t question her once and decides she’s more than happy to have someone by her side. Cassie’s cat follows them through the maze, winding its way through their feet – a silent protector.

Suddenly, Cassie stops dead in her tracks, arriving at a chunk of stone that doesn’t appear to be any different from the rest.

“What is it?” Caitlyn asks, her tone worried.

Without replying, Cassie extends her hand towards the wall, placing her palm against the surface once more.

A series of runes begin to appear in the stone. “Of course it’s Runes,” Cassie laughs, already anticipating Hermione’s *I told you so*.

As she stares at the markings and attempts to decipher them, Caitlyn approaches as well.

“There are three different runic alphabets being used,” the witch notes, dragging her hand across the surface. As she does, words start to form beneath the runes.

“I think it’s an incantation,” Caitlyn whispers. “Should we try?”

Without hesitating, Cassie recites the spell “*via ad effugium faciam se purgare*” while clearly enunciating each syllable.

Suddenly the wall starts to lower in the ground to the left of the runes, revealing the exit. Caitlyn makes a beeline for the now-exit, but Cassie suddenly urges her to wait.

“The runes, surely they’re important,” she explains.

Caitlyn nods reluctantly, “probably, yeah. Let’s transfigure something into parchment and a quill so we can write them down.”

Cassie removes her hair ties and casts the simple spell on the first one.

But it doesn’t change, or even move in the slightest. She stares in confusion. “You try,” she says, passing it to Caitlyn

Caitlyn attempts the same spell, the hair tie remaining completely unchanged. “What the hell,” she mutters under her breath, trying again with no success.

“Do you think the maze is stopping the transfiguration from occurring?” Cassie guesses.

“Maybe..” Caitlyn replies as she attempts to transfigure her shoe to no avail.

“I’m sure that we need to remember these runes,” Cassie explains, “water of luck and all that.”

Caitlyn nods, “I agree, but I certainly don’t have a photographic memory.”

Cassie's mind whirs, realizing that she should be able to remember this very moment — with Occlumency. "Give me a second," she whispers, staring at the runes before her. She focuses on each individual stroke, committing it to memory. When she reaches the final rune, she closes her eyes and enters her mind.

She sits at the kitchen table and watches herself from a third-person perspective, outside of her body as she is now in the maze. She pauses the scene, now resembling a photograph, and folds it delicately into four quadrants.

She stands and makes her way to the drawer, removing one single raspberry chocolate bar. There, she folds back the wrapping and adds the photograph of the runes. Once the drawer is shut once more, she casts a protective enchantment over the drawer, and exits her mind, returning to her body.

"Okay, I'll remember," she smiles at the witch next to her.

"You sure?" she confirms.

"Trust me," she nods.

Together, the two girls step out of the maze at the exact same time, tying them for first place.

The Great Hall

Hermione breathes a sigh of relief the moment Cassie steps out of the Maze, releasing her hand from Malfoy's to rest her head in her hands. She stays this way until her heart rate drops back down to a normal pace. She vows to take a draught of peace before the second task because she isn't sure if she can do *that* again.

After another hour of waiting for three other champions Mukisa, Mei and Luiz to emerge from the maze, the three remaining are deemed as *incomplete*. She feels a stab of pity for Charles, Nikolai, and Aleksei, but remains thankful that Cassie had come out unscathed.

Charles is absolutely loopy when he's removed from the maze, a giggling mess. Nikolai is as stiff as a board, unable to move, staring straight ahead with fright in his eyes. Aleksei just looks annoyed.

When the champions return to Hogwarts, Hermione runs towards Cassie, pulling her into the tightest hug possible. She pulls away only when she notices the arrival of Remus and Sirius, the latter having run up to the castle the minute Cassie stepped out of the maze.

Draco stands a few feet away, watching Hermione with a small smile. If one looks closely, one will find his eyes swimming with an emotion that can only be described as longing.

He's always admired the capacity the witch possesses to love with her entire being. He believes that her ability to love so fully and so powerfully is one of the most beautiful things about her.

He wonders, or rather hopes, that he might be so lucky to experience Hermione's love once more. *Maybe someday*, he tells himself.

Songs for Malfoy, Christmas '98

Chapter Notes

Beta love ♥ to whits_end & a huge thank you to likelyunfinished, peoniesandcedarwood and callcalypso for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

As always, I am so thankful for each and every one of you that is following along with this story. I love reading every single one of your comments, your reactions absolutely make my day.

P.s. this chapter is heavily influenced by *Midnights* which I listened to on a non-stop loop while writing this.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hermione spent most of her childhood alone with her books, convincing herself that that was exactly what she wanted to be doing. She'd hide away at school, tucked in the corner somewhere, out of sight. She'd tell herself that it's okay that no one wanted to be her friend because she didn't want to be friends with them anyways.

She had given up attempting to make friends quite quickly, the children around her not interesting her in the slightest. At the beginning of each term, Hermione would hope and pray that a student would arrive at her school, maybe someone like her, someone she could become friends with. But of course, this day never came. Instead, before Hermione knew that she was a witch, she found acceptance and belonging in the words on the pages before her, the ramblings of others helping her feel like maybe she isn't so alone after all.

She had a few books in particular that she would always turn to when she needed a friend. Her favourite, besides the Wizard of Oz, of course, was and still is *Little Women*. Hermione likes this story in particular for a multitude of reasons, but the unique feeling of hope that the tale brings is what keeps her coming back to its pages time and time again.

Hermione has always longed for sisters or a sibling of any kind. It would be nice, she thinks, to have a predestined best friend. Sometimes she would imagine that she was a March sister, surrounded by smiles, joy, hugs, and plays. She longed for this sense of belonging, to feel understood, to be a part of something bigger than herself. This longing, however, could be broken down and understood quite simply: Hermione just wanted to feel accepted, and maybe even loved.

She knows her parents love her, there's no denying that. At times, however, Hermione feels more like an extension of their love for one another rather than the intended recipient. Sometimes, she feels like her parents only see half of who she is – the half they want to see. Even before their obliviation, Hermione never felt like her parents saw her as the girl standing in front of them, instead choosing to only acknowledge the aspects of her that they wanted to.

Her mother looks at Hermione and sees her bushy hair, toothy grin, and dry sense of humour – all things she had inherited from her father. Her father glances at his daughter and hears the laugh that

echoes her mother's, her honey-brown eyes, and her analytical brain. Neither of them seem capable of recognizing that her two halves are a part of something larger, not just a fraction of the person they love, but a reflection of themselves as well.

Hermione has been longing for someone to see her, all of her, for what feels like forever.

When she first arrived at Hogwarts, she worried that she was destined for another seven years of loneliness. She tried her hardest to make friends, optimistic that she would surely find someone *like her* at a school such as Hogwarts. But after the teasing and the rude comments began again, Hermione – at the young age of eleven – felt something crack inside of her; a crevice opening up, never to be closed again.

So, when Harry and Ron came to her rescue during the troll incident on Halloween, she'd vowed to *do* and be *anything* to remain their friend. She became wholly convinced that the two boys who had been laughing about her only a few days prior were her best choice. A route to acceptance and being a part of *something*.

Hermione had undoubtedly gotten her wish as a part of the famous golden trio, but not necessarily in the way she'd initially imagined.. Hermione helped her two friends study, essentially completed all of their assignments three separate times, and put her life on the line year after year. She would have done anything, truthfully, to ensure that they wouldn't abandon her.

In third year, when Harry and Ron started to ignore her after the broomstick incident, she panicked. She'd only been trying to protect Harry and keep him safe from potential threats. But no, of course the boys didn't see it that way. They told her she was being controlling, overdramatic, and countless other terms she'd never thought she would hear come out of their mouths, at least not with her on the receiving end.

When Harry and Ron were fighting in fourth year, Hermione spread herself thin, attempting to maintain her friendship with them individually. It had been incredibly frustrating to deal with the bruised egos of two hormonal teenage boys, but she'd stuck it out. In hindsight, she wishes that she would have told them to get it together on their own. They had been acting ridiculous, after all.

A short month later, something occurred that Hermione would never have predicted – someone had *noticed* for the first time. She had never thought that someone like Viktor Krum would take an interest in her, and even though they would never have worked out in the long term, Hermione's thankful that she did go to the Yule Ball with him. She was grateful because that night was the first time she'd ever felt *seen* – not for her smarts, her cleverness, or association with Harry Potter, but *her*. She feels vain or superficial sometimes to admit to even herself that she cares about such a thing, but it's true – it's a nice feeling to be desired.

Then, of course, Ron had gone and made a mess of everything. He'd told her she was fraternising with the enemy and attempted to convince her that Viktor had only asked her to get information about Harry. She'd been upset, mostly because she'd originally been hoping that Ron would ask her, that he'd view her as a worthwhile option for his date. He'd left it until the last minute – in classic Ron fashion – and Hermione had been glad that she hadn't sat around waiting for him to ask.

There were many other instances, where Hermione would consider whether her friendship with Harry and Ron was benefiting her in the same way it was them. But any time such a thought would cross her mind, she'd swat it away. Rather than give in to the useless notion, she buried it in the back of her mind and reminded herself that she really didn't have any other options. There is also

the fact that she loves them both. No matter how stupid they may act, Hermione will always love her boys.

But it's a different kind of love that she desires, the love she reads about in her books. Hermione daydreams of being swept off her feet by the right person, a person who will look at her like she puts the stars in the sky. She dreams of grand love confessions and dancing in the rain. She dreams of intimate moments, and words shared with only a glance. She dreams of someone who will see her as worth more than the sum of her individual traits.

She'd been so sure that she'd found this, in Oxford. But, she'd been afraid to admit it to herself, let alone the wizard in question. It felt almost too good to be true.

And in the end, it had been. She'd been so sure – *until recently* .

At first, she'd been upset to see him in the apartment across the hall from her. Oxford was supposed to be her fresh start, a place for her to re-invent herself and be exactly who she wanted to be.

The University of Oxford had acted as a beacon of sorts for Hermione for as long as she could remember. Even before she was a witch, she'd dreamt of the ancient school and its stone corridors concealing the whispers of scholars from far before her time. It had been a light at the end of her very long tunnel, something to look forward to, to strive for. Even during the Horcrux hunt, Hermione had found her thoughts drifting to the cloisters at New College, or the ancient tomes on the shelves. It had been a small escape for her, during those dark times.

So when she'd actually got in, the letter of acceptance arriving via owl at the Gryffindor table, she'd stared in awe at the parchment. It almost didn't feel real, that the thing she'd dreamed of for so long was coming true. She'd latched onto this next stage of her life, determined that she would take full advantage of this opportunity. She finally had the opportunity to exist unburdened by the associations of her past, and she wouldn't waste it.

But, Draco's appearance meant that she couldn't shed her old skin entirely, because he would still be able to see the scars where it had once been. He'd seen her at her worst during their eighth year – a result of peculiar circumstances, or perhaps the planets, fates, and all the stars aligning. She'd never seen it coming, her friendship with the Slytherin. But after a while, she'd stopped fighting it. By Christmas of their eighth year, she'd accepted that Draco Malfoy was simply meant to be a part of her life.

In what capacity, however, she was still unsure.

December 18th, 1998, The Room of Requirement

It's the last day of term, a few short hours before the Hogwarts Express is set to travel from Hogsmeade to King's Cross in London when Draco slips into the Room of Requirement unnoticed, intending to place a stasis charm over his work. He's exceedingly proud of the progress he's made so far. His happy memories potion is nowhere near complete, but he's certain he's on the right track. Just as he's inspecting the contents, he hears the door creak open.

"Hey Theo," he says without looking up from his work.

"-Er, it's Hermione, actually," he hears.

His head snaps up, his gaze landing on the very awkward-looking witch. She's standing with her feet pointing toward each other, her eyes darting around the room with her shoulders hunched.

"Oh, do you need something, Granger?" Draco asks, uncertain why the witch had come to find him.

"I have something for you. I just wanted to give it to you, before the train," she explains hurriedly.

Draco's eyes go wide at this, but Hermione catches his reaction. "It's okay if you didn't get me anything, I didn't expect you to," she smiles. She'd been second-guessing herself ever since his gift had arrived a few days prior, and quite frankly still hadn't had her mind made up when she'd entered the door just now.

"Sorry about that," Draco replies anyway.

Hermione hesitantly approaches him, arms outstretched. Draco accepts the box, wondering what on earth it could be. She watches with rapt attention as he opens the box. He feels incredibly awkward with her anticipatory stare on him. Eventually, he removes a weirdly shaped contraption of sorts. Truth be told, he hasn't the slightest idea what it is. "Er, thanks, Granger, it's nice," he responds politely.

She laughs before closing the space between them. She reaches out to grab it from him and sets it on the potions table. "It's called a walkman," she smiles. "I've charmed it so it works without electricity or speakers or headphones."

"Head... Phones?" His brows furrow as he tries to think what a *head-phone* would entail.

The witch waves him off with a laugh. "Don't worry about it."

Draco nods at this, still confused. "And what does this do?" he asks, slightly embarrassed.

"It's to listen to music," she replies as she presses a button, the machine whirring to life. Suddenly, a song starts to play, and Draco's eyes widen.

"Where's the music coming from?" he asks. At the manor, they have a piano and a gramophone, but the device is much smaller than both of those things.

"It's a CD," Hermione replies. "I, er, just added some songs I like, since I wasn't sure what kind of music you listen to." She hands him a case, the words "Songs for Malfoy, Christmas '98" written in her perfect handwriting.

Hermione suddenly becomes very self-conscious about her gift. He'd mentioned that he enjoys music a few weeks prior, but she's just now realizing that he probably won't enjoy the type of songs she had opted to include. She's wanted to give him the opportunity to listen to good muggle music, something besides classical music.

Over the summer she'd had quite a bit of free time, and had resigned herself to wandering Muggle London in search of entertainment. She'd been feeling extremely disconnected from her muggle side after the Battle of Hogwarts, and found it soothing to exist amongst simplicity and familiarity.

Every day of her summer holidays, she would Floo from the Burrow to the Leaky Cauldron and walk aimlessly around a different area of London. She'd happily take the tube, pick a station at random, and get off.

One day, she stumbled upon a small café on Regency Street – it had stuck out to her, most likely due to the colourful exterior and music that could be heard each time the door swung open. She'd entered and ordered her usual latte before taking a seat at a table by the window to escape into the book she'd brought, *Pride and Prejudice*. Two lattes and three and a half hours later, she'd read the book in its entirety.

She'd looked up and caught the eye of the barista, a rather handsome boy about her age with curly blonde hair, and kind green eyes. "Good book?" he'd asked.

"Of course, it's Jane Austen," she replied sheepishly.

She'd returned to the small café almost every day after that. Over time, she and the boy – Jack – became friends. Jack, as it turns out, was studying English Literature at King's College, and was therefore able to hold his own in a conversation with Hermione. Jack also enjoyed music and took great pride in showing Hermione all of his favourite songs.

Hermione imagines that Jack had likely found her a bit odd at first, considering how little she knew about the music that was popular those days. He'd looked at her with a funny expression when she'd admitted she didn't know a song that had been playing on the radio for the past six months. Now, while this hadn't discouraged Hermione from continuing her friendship with Jack, it did serve as a healthy reminder – a reminder that she's spread thinly between her two worlds, one foot stuck on either side of the dividing line, never fully belonging to either of them.

By the end of the summer when she'd bid a final farewell to Jack, Hermione had adopted a new appreciation for muggle music. She'd brought her walkman with her to school for eighth year, though it had taken quite a combination of spells to allow it to function once she'd arrived at Hogwarts. She'd burnt ten CDs before her return, storing them neatly in her beaded bag.

One night as she lay awake in bed, listening to one of her favourite songs, she'd thought of *him*. As she stared at the canopy over her four-poster, she began to wonder why the Slytherin had popped into her mind.

They had certainly been spending a lot of time together since Halloween, and Hermione still wasn't quite sure what to make of it. Her time spent with Theo and Malfoy was kept a secret, for her benefit or theirs she is unsure. She simply didn't want to have the conversation with her friends - her Gryffindor friends that is. She especially didn't want Ron to find out – not because she's embarrassed of the Slytherins by any means, she just didn't have the energy to deal with Ron's childishness on the topic.

After the idea had struck her – to give Draco Muggle music as a Christmas present, Hermione had sent a letter through the Muggle post to Jack asking for his assistance. The post office in Hogsmeade had just recently started offering the service, and for that Hermione was thankful.

Hi Jack,

I hope you're doing well. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch, school has already been hectic.

I was wondering if I might ask you a favour. I have a friend here at school, and I'd like to give them a CD for Christmas with some of the music you showed me.

If it isn't too much trouble, would you be able to make a CD for me, and mail it to me at school?

Here are the ten songs I'm hoping you can include:

More Than a Woman - The BeeGees

Dreams - The Cranberries

Bitter Sweet Symphony - The Verve

California Dreamin' - The Mamas and the Papas

Karma Police - Radiohead

There Is a Light That Never Goes Out - The Smiths

Iris - The Goo Goo Dolls

Dreams - Fleetwood Mac

Vienna - Billy Joel

There She Goes - The La's

Thank you,

Mione x

She felt some guilt for asking Jack to do this for her, but she had no other means of acquiring the CD – it wasn't like she could ask her parents to, after all. Jack, bless him, had sent the CD back promptly with a small note.

Hey Mione,

Happy to hear from you, I've been missing you around the café.

Whoever this friend of yours is, I hope he realizes he's a lucky bloke.

Maybe I'll see you over the Holidays?

Jack x

Hermione had smiled at this, mostly because she had specifically not used "him" when referencing her friend. She wasn't naive to the fact that giving someone a CD with music that you chose specifically for them could be viewed as *intimate* – she's just banking on the fact that Malfoy won't have a clue about the implications.

She isn't intending for it to come across as intimate, she really isn't. Sure, she is intending to give him her personal walkman, but only because it made the most sense logically – she could just buy another one when she was in London over the holidays.

December 18th, 1998, The Room of Requirement

“If you want to listen, you just have to click this button here, see?” she asks, attempting to teach Malfoy how to navigate the device.

“If you want the music to be louder, this one, or quieter, this one.” Malfoy nods, eagerly following along. “If you want to go to the next song, you click this one, and if you want to pause a song, this one.”

While Hermione rambles on about the various functions, Draco stares at her intently. He watches how her face lights up as she explains why she likes a few of the songs, and smiles as her curls bounce along to the tune.

“Now you try,” she says suddenly, passing the walkman to him.

Draco grows worried, mostly because he hadn’t been paying attention to her explanation for the past few minutes, his mind had been ... *elsewhere*.

December 2nd, 2006, The Three Broomsticks

Professor Malfoy has a very important errand to run today, one that involves going into Muggle London. After the chilly walk to the Three Broomsticks, he’d downed a glass of firewhiskey before stepping through the Floo.

When he emerges, he’s at The Leaky Cauldron, Theodore Nott’s grinning face there to greet him.

“Well if it isn’t my favourite Hogwarts Professor,” he jeers, slapping his friend on the arm. “Don’t tell Granger I said that,” he adds quickly.

Draco only scowls, he’s quite nervous about this whole outing.

“So what’s this big mysterious trip about?” Theo asks, his eyebrows raised. “I know it must be important if you’re okay with me closing the Apothecary for the day.”

Draco sighs, “I need you to come with me into Muggle London.”

Theo’s eyebrows raise at this, clearly shocked. Draco isn’t one to venture outside of Diagon Alley. Not because of prejudice or anything like that, he simply doesn’t like feeling uncomfortable. Something about the way Muggles move about confuses Draco greatly – the way they always seem to be in a hurry. He reasons that because their methods of transport are more time-consuming, they must have to rush from place to place. But, what frightens Draco most of all is the ‘*Tube*’. Draco had attempted to explain the concept to his mother a few years prior, earning only a disgusted scowl.

“It’s a train that runs underground, but it’s very dirty and loud, and not everyone has a seat,” he’d explained.

Theo, however, had become almost completely acclimatized to Muggle Society over the past few years – he’d continued to fall in love with anything muggle after graduating Hogwarts. His adventures soon expanded past the cinema, to include Muggle pubs and Football games.

Theo had been very confused the first time he'd stumbled across a pub and decided to investigate. There had been a large group of men gathered around extremely small cinema screens. The small men on the screen were chasing around a ball the size of a quaffle, an act Theo had found hilarious.

A man had asked him who he was supporting, and in a panic, Theo had read back the team on the man's jersey, "Arsenal." The man had clapped him on the back and handed him a pint – Theo had been hooked ever since.

Over the years, Theo had become quite confident navigating the Muggle Tube system, hence Draco's request that he accompany him today.

"And what do you need in Muggle London?" Theo asks, almost concerned.

"I want to buy a CD," Draco replies simply.

"Since when do you listen to CDs?" Theo asks with a laugh.

Draco tries to plan his reply quickly, realizing that he'll have to admit to one of two things. His first option is to reveal that he's had a CD player for many years now, one that has likely gone out of style since he received it. This would inevitably raise questions about where he got such a thing, and he isn't even sure how he'd get around admitting that it had been Granger who purchased it for him.

The alternative option is to admit that the CD isn't for him at all, it's for Granger. "It's a Christmas gift," he replies simply, hoping that's enough.

"Lots of muggles in your life now?" Theo asks, his expression slowly morphing into one of realization. "Or muggleborns?" he adds with a smirk.

Suddenly, Draco has an idea. "The professors are doing a gift exchange, I pulled her name."

Theo nods, his mouth spread into a grin. "Well that's convenient, mate."

"Convenient?" Draco asks, suddenly worrying that Theo knows far more than he should.

"Well, you know her best of all the Professors, no?" Theo asks.

"Oh, er, yes, exactly."

After a short ride on the Tube and nearly getting lost in the Underground, Draco and Theo emerge at Tottenham Court Road. Draco blindly follows Theo, hoping he knows where they're going. Eventually, they arrive at a record store that's filled to the brim with more records and CDs than Draco could have ever previously fathomed.

"What CD are you looking for?" Theo asks, guiding Draco through the rows of vinyl.

"I'm not sure," Draco replies simply.

"Do you know what Hermione listens to?"

Draco knows ten songs that the witch likes, though that had been quite a few years ago. He's never even purchased another CD, he just plays the same songs over and over.

He knows them all by heart now. “The Cranberries,” he replies simply. After refusing to ask the shopkeeper for assistance, the two wizards locate the one singular Cranberries CD in the store.

Draco stares at it for a moment, realizing for the first time that the people singing the songs are real muggles. He stares at the four of them on the cover, understanding now that he’d been hearing their voices for the past eight years.

The two wizards march up to the counter, quite pleased that they found what they were looking for. Theo pays for the CD with his Muggle currency, Draco having forgotten about this financial aspect of the trip completely.

As they exit out onto the street once more, Draco carefully tucks the CD into his jacket with a smile.

December 2nd, 2006, The Hogwarts Library

As Cassie meanders her way through the shelves with her eyes narrowed, she reviews her plan in her head. It’s a genius idea, really, to collaborate with the two other witches in the Championship. Cassie knows for a fact that the five wizards will all be far too proud to work with one another, meaning that the three witches putting their heads together could give them the upper hand.

It’s clear that they’re both talented witches. Mei in particular, Cassie thinks.

She peeks her head around the last shelf, tucked all the way in the back of the library. There at the table is Caitlyn, her hair swept up into a plait, her brow furrowed as she reads the book before her. Cassie approaches with a smile and a polite “hi.”

The witch reels around, clearly shocked. “Oh, hey, Cassie,” she replies, avoiding the Slytherin’s gaze.

“Can I sit?” Cassie asks, gesturing to the other wooden chair at the table. Caitlyn only nods.

“I have a proposal for you,” Cassie begins with a grin.

“And what’s that?”

“Well, I think that we worked well together, during the last task.”

“I didn’t do much,” Caitlyn replies sheepishly.

“But it was nice to have each other’s backs, you know?” Cassie clarifies.

“Yeah,” Caitlyn nods.

“I think we should work together, maybe with Mei too,” Cassie says, her voice rushed.

“Work together?”

“You know the boys won’t help each other, they’re all too proud. It could help us all if we work together,” Cassie explains.

Caitlyn ponders this offer before offering a hesitant nod. “Okay, yeah,” she smiles.

After locating the Mahoutokoro common room near Ravenclaw tower, Cassie and Caitlyn plead their case to Mei. At first, the girl is hesitant.

Cassie understands that it would be hard to trust two witches you know nothing about. After all, this could all be some ruse that would lead to Mei's failure. It isn't, however; Cassie's intentions are completely genuine.

Eventually, Mei shrugs and nods her head with a smile.

"Excellent," Cassie grins, "we can start now."

Cassie leads the two witches to a wall on the seventh floor across from the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. At first, the two girls are confused, for the wall is very much blank and unassuming. They stare, bewildered as Cassie begins to pace in front of the wall. Eventually, a large brass door reveals itself.

Cassie turns back toward them with a devilish grin on her face and pushes the door open.

Caitlyn's jaw falls open at the sight; Mei's eyes grow wide. They had both been expecting a classroom of some kind, or perhaps an abandoned storeroom.

But no, the room that they now occupy is not a classroom at all. The ceiling above them reflects that of the night sky, the walls lined with bookshelves and windows. In the centre of the room is a training area with padded flooring. Two oak tables flank on either side of this, with various magical instruments for them to use.

"Wow," Caitlyn says with a smile, eagerly inspecting the tables. "What is this place?"

"It's called the Room of Requirement, or the Come and Go Room," Cassie explains. "It only appears when a person is in great need of it."

"Hermione, my Godmother, says that she believes the room to have some degree of sentience. It's able to transform itself into whatever the person may need. For example, I just told it we need somewhere to prepare for the Championship."

Mei stares at the night sky in awe, her head tipped back. "What do you think the next task will be?" she asks. Cassie remains impressed by Hermione's linguistic charm. Mei's voice sounds perfectly like her own, with a slight Japanese accent.

"Well, I have an idea," Cassie smiles, sharing a knowing look with Caitlyn.

"We found runes inscribed at the exit, we think they're a clue," Caitlyn elaborates.

"These runes, do you remember them?" Mei asks. Caitlyn glances toward Cassie with a worried look.

"Of course I do," Cassie smiles. Suddenly a pensieve appears in front of her, all she had to do was ask the room to provide one.

She closes her eyes and focuses on the chocolate bar containing her memory of the runes, staring at it from within her mind as she removes it with her wand. She gently places the wisp into the pensieve, the scene of the maze appearing in the waters below.

“Shall we?” she asks, gesturing toward the memory.

December 3rd, 2006, Professor Malfoy's Office

Draco paces anxiously from one end of his office to the other. Last night when he'd returned to the castle, CD in hand, he'd come up with a plan.

This plan, while simple in ideation, seems to be far more difficult for Draco to actually put into practice. He'd convinced himself that he'd built a relationship with Granger once before, meaning that it could certainly happen again.

However, as he'd expressed to his Mind Healer not an hour ago, he's worried that Granger will never allow him into her life again, after what had happened.

His first attempt at becoming closer to Granger had been a success, of course. In eighth year, he'd made efforts here and there to show the witch that he was no longer the prat he'd once been. He'd let his guard down and allowed her to see past the facade of practiced indifference and superiority.

They'd developed a friendship of sorts, and for a while he'd been quite content to remain this way, as friends. It was more than he could have ever hoped for, to simply be allowed into her life in a role that was positive, rather than negative. Considering where they'd started, being friends was more than enough.

Over time, this friendship had awoken something in Draco's soul, some part of himself he didn't even know existed, or rather, had tried to ignore for far too long.

He realized that he'd been clinging to the very few moments and memories he had of her. Leaving her cupcakes in the library, for example – he would play those memories over and over in his head like a one-sided record, a small smile appearing on his face as soon as he saw hers light up in excitement.

Before their friendship, these few positive memories were all he had, his fascination with her remaining manageable, comprehensible even. At first, he'd reasoned that he found her curious simply because she was muggleborn and therefore different. Not different in a bad, prejudiced kind of way, but the kind of different that piques your curiosity.

Once he started spending more time with her, however, the memories and moments with her brought his fascination to an all-time high. No longer was he restricted to a few short moments to ponder – now he had a multitude to pick from.

It didn't help when she'd asked him to start meditating to find his *happy place*. Suddenly, his thoughts of her weren't filled with smiles and laughs, but different scenarios entirely.

He would lay awake at night, his eyes wide, wondering what the witch was doing at that very moment. At first, he'd picture her reading in bed, probably in her Gryffindor sweater, her wand casting a light while the curtains around her bed are pulled shut. But, after a few minutes, his eighteen-year-old brain would shift the scene.

Suddenly, instead of Gryffindor red, Hermione would be sporting a green Slytherin sweater. Her hair would be loose and wild, framing her face as she read, the warm glow emanating from her wand causing her eyes to light up, resembling pools of golden honey.

Sometimes, Draco would stop his train of thought here, pulling out of his mind and forcing himself into a very cold shower.

Other times, he would allow the train to continue to race down the track in reckless abandon, arriving at a scene that rendered Draco's brain incapable of thinking about anything else.

Usually, this would involve Hermione in his quidditch sweater and nothing else, the curtains around her bed drawn, a silencing charm cast. Her curls would be spread across her pillow, her eyes shut with her head tilted back, and her mouth slightly ajar. Her hands would drag across her skin, eventually finding their way between her legs, her thighs falling open.

Sometimes, Draco would picture himself tangled between her limbs, his fingers trailing across her body as she would part her lips in bliss. He could practically feel her quickened heartbeats against his chest, her movements frantic with want. He would drag his teeth across her bottom lip, causing the most intoxicating little sighs to emerge from her mouth. Draco's head would begin to spin at this point, ultimately bringing on his release.

Eventually, even the cold showers proved ineffective at ceasing his thoughts, his mind eventually wandering to *her* in the freezing spray. He would envision the individual droplets of water that would cascade down her body, turning his eyes to black ice as he watched with rapt attention. He would pull her into his core, desperate to feel her against him, the need to feel every inch of her taking precedence over everything else. He would roll his body into hers as he pressed her against the tile, her hands wrapping around his neck to pull him closer, meeting him with equal fervour. His hands would become tangled in her hair as sighs would begin to escape her mouth, eventually turning to whimpers of need.

Draco's night became filled with thoughts of the curly-haired witch and nothing else. And interestingly enough, his nightmares improved significantly as a result of indulging in these Granger-focused fantasies.

By the end of their eighth year, Draco knew for certain that his fascination had grown far past just wanting to be her friend. He had begun to look forward to the time they spent together more than any other aspect of his day. He found himself searching for reasons to be in her presence, even momentarily considering taking up knitting to help her free the house elves, or whatever her mission was.

The day the owl had swept into the Great Hall and landed in front of her at The Gryffindor table, he'd been determined to know where Granger had been accepted for her Mastery. A week prior, she'd casually mentioned all the schools that she was applying to, and Draco had immediately started to recall any kind of connections the Malfoys had to the various universities.

He was certain that there was potential for Granger and him to become more than what they currently were. But, he also realized that so long as their time spent together was restricted to the castle, she would never see him as anyone other than the horrible adolescent he had been.

Draco hoped that if they could spend time together – outside of Hogwarts – Granger might see him differently. He certainly didn't intend to force anything and was quite content to remain her friend if that was what she desired, but he was determined to at least try. He didn't even want to imagine the regret he may feel later on in life if he'd never made so much as an attempt.

So, the minute he'd caught word that Granger planned to attend Oxford, he'd sent his owl to his mother regarding his new plan to attain a Mastery in Potions.

Narcissa had been all too willing to help, especially after she saw the announcement in the Prophet of the Golden Girl's plans to also pursue a Mastery at the same school Draco had casually mentioned an interest in. Narcissa Malfoy is, after all, no fool. And far more devious than anyone gives her credit for.

A few short months later, it was no coincidence that Draco ended up in the same lab as Hermione Granger with a renewed sense of hope in his heart.

Now, many years later, he's deduced that all he has to do is become reacquainted with the witch. It is as simple as finding reasons to be in her presence once more.

Because this time, Draco is no longer scared to be loved by Hermione Granger.

I made a playlist of the songs that Hermione gifts to Draco (aka the only muggle songs Draco knows) for your listening pleasure:



Chapter End Notes

I made a playlist of the songs that Hermione gifts to Draco (aka the only muggle songs Draco knows) for your listening pleasure:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3805TMRMihnyMMMwXrp54V?si=8bb1103944e24d85>

Hope you enjoy listening!

The Foggy Bean Café

Chapter Notes

A huge thank you to likelyunfinished and callcalypso for reading this chapter & providing feedback !!

As always, I appreciate all your comments and kudos SO heckin much!! This little story means so much to me, and I'm so glad you're all enjoying it xx

Sorry for the delay, had a really hectic week! Enjoy :)

Hermione is exhausted. She is so exhausted in fact, that she actually asks for assistance with her to-do list. She is very much regretting her decision to take on the responsibility of organizing the Yule Ball, especially after the band she'd booked weeks ago sent an owl informing her that they'd been double-booked.

She storms down the corridor toward the staff room, vowing to ask for assistance from whichever poor soul is in the room trying to enjoy some peace and quiet.

It's not that she's incapable of doing everything by herself, she's just trying to actually implement her Mind Healer's advice.

"It's okay to ask for help, Hermione," he said and smiled at her.

"But people never do it the way they should, and then I end up having to do it anyway," she argued.

"What do you deem as the proper way to do something?" he asked.

Hermione paused for a moment, realizing she'd fallen into a trap. "The way I would do it," she admitted.

"And is the way you do something the only way to do it correctly?"

"No," she mumbled.

She sees this as the perfect opportunity to practice delegation, lightening her load. But of course, the moment she enters the dimly lit room, there is only one member of staff present.

"Hello," she smiles, her face lighting up at the sight of him. She'd been hoping he would be here, while simultaneously hoping he wouldn't be.

Hermione has reached a point of reluctant acceptance regarding Malfoy's presence at the school. It had been difficult at first, to see him again. But, with time, she can feel the shields she had put up begin to melt away once more. She certainly isn't back to the point she once had been, but something about Malfoy has always been weirdly calming to her.

Ever since they'd grown close in eighth year, she'd felt safe in his presence. At first, this feeling confused her greatly – isn't Draco Malfoy the last person that she should feel safe around?

She believes that she first started to notice the Slytherin had *changed* when she first saw him after the war, at Cornerstone books. Some people may have not noticed the small changes – the way his face was less sunken, his grey eyes somehow brighter – but Hermione had.

She'd been a silent observer of the *Slytherin Prince* ever since she'd met him on the train on September first, all those years ago.

September 1, 1991, The Hogwarts Express

"Excuse me, have any of you seen a toad? A boy named Neville's lost one," she asks, poking her head into yet another compartment. She was not really sure why she'd agreed to help the boy, but the fear on his face at the prospect of losing his familiar had set her into action.

"A toad? Someone has brought a toad?" laughs the girl to her left, her ink-black hair cut into a short bob.

"Yes, well, if you see it, do let me know," she smiles, moving to close the compartment door once more.

"And who are you?" the blonde boy asks, staring at her with a look of confusion on his face.

"Hermione," she smiles, feeling a slight flutter in her chest. She wonders if perhaps these students will become her friends – she hopes that they'll let her join their circle; they are evidently already close. She feels a pang of jealousy – all the magical-born students have had years to get to know one another already.

"Malfoy, Draco Malfoy," the boy smiles, extending his hand toward the girl. She hesitantly accepts it, giving it a shake. She finds this rather peculiar, children trying to act like adults.

"What's your last name, then?" the girl to her left asks.

"Granger," Hermione replies, confused as to why this would matter. Everyone in the compartment tilts their head slightly as if seeing her in a new light.

"Are you related to the Dagworth-Grangers?" a curly-haired boy at the back asks. This is the first of many times that Hermione hears this question upon her arrival in the wizarding world.

"I don't believe so, I'm muggleborn," Hermione smiles. This smile quickly fades, however, when she notices the expressions of all those present shifts. Instead of their welcoming smiles, they now wear expressions ranging anywhere from confusion to disgust.

"Well, it's been a pleasure," Malfoy nods, standing to escort her out of the compartment. The moment she steps outside, he shuts the door.

Hermione stares at the door with a frown, a single tear making its way down her cheek.

Hermione found herself intrigued by the boy from there on out. Something about the air of superiority he maintained at all times was enthralling to observe, mostly because she could tell that

it was all an act.

Sometimes, when he thought no one was looking, Malfoy's smirk would disappear, being replaced with an expression that could only be described as *tired*. Hermione reasoned that it would be quite exhausting to maintain such a charade at all times.

At first, Malfoy was almost civil toward her, meaning that he simply acted as if she didn't exist. It wasn't until their first term marks came out, and she was deemed top of their class, that he became downright awful.

As she became older and wiser, she realized that the boy didn't actually hate her, not really. He was threatened by her, for whatever reason. He was exceptionally smart, constantly tailing behind her by only a few points. The scowls and comments increased in frequency until one day, she finally lost it.

Punching him in the face had felt great, amazing even. Three years' worth of annoyance all swept up into one singular punch. She was glad she'd used brute force rather than magic; it made her feel like she was proving a point.

As the years wore on, Malfoy's comments and sneers lessened until they became essentially nonexistent in sixth year. "He looks different don't you think? Malfoy. Almost ill," she'd asked her friends. They'd only asked why she would notice such a thing. Truth be told, she isn't sure why she had noticed.

She also wasn't sure why she always sat in the exact same spot in the Great Hall – a seat with a perfect view of the Slytherin table. She wasn't sure why her heartbeat would quicken when he would notice her glance, or why she would smile to herself when he would nod as their eyes met, rather than sneering.

By sixth year, this routine had become habitual for Hermione, something she no longer questioned. Sometimes she felt like she was the only one who was noticing his steady decline – the way he would disappear from existence, missing classes and meal times. These behaviours stood out to her because while he had always been a pompous prat, he'd never been one to miss class and risk falling behind.

As the year wore on, Hermione was wholly convinced that he was turning into a ghost, his very spirit fading into nothingness, his outline becoming translucent as time passed. She'd inadvertently developed an unconscious protectiveness toward the Slytherin, which Hermione admitted to no one at the time, not even herself. It wasn't very sensible to worry about him, after all. So why would she feel the desire to protect someone who had never sent an ounce of kindness in her direction?

But, as sixth year continued into the darkness, she realized a fact that she would never forget. Malfoy, just like everyone else, was a product of his upbringing; his fate predestined long before he took his first breath.

At birth, everyone is assigned a role they must occupy for the rest of their existence. Draco is simply the other side of her coin, her diametric opposite in every way. Because while Hermione had to deal with the constant awareness that she would have to do exponentially more work than all her peers to receive the same amount of recognition, she's always been free to make her own choices and be in charge of her fate.

Draco had never been granted such a luxury to choose his own path. His ancestors had determined his fate: most likely his grandfather – the first to join forces with the Dark Lord.

Hermione could separate the wizard she observed from the act he maintained, understanding that just like everyone else, he had built up his walls around him, using his sneer and hostility as protection. Hermione had done the same, though with a different approach – by hiding her fears of inadequacy behind an act of assured confidence and determination. Everyone would poke fun at her for her swotty attitude, but she would much rather be known for being an exceptionally swotty muggleborn than an inadequate one.

She felt like she'd owed it to her fellow muggleborns, to prove that they deserve a place in their world just as much as any other half-blood or pure-blood witch or wizard.

Hermione had never really expected to have an opportunity to get to know Malfoy – the real wizard behind the facade. She'd stared at him, bewildered when she'd seen him at Cornerstone.

Because the boy standing before her was no longer a boy at all, Draco Malfoy had become weathered over the past few years – his posture and expression one of someone far older than him in years, though their life experiences were likely at par.

Hermione has always believed in second chances, as well as in seeing the best in people. So when Malfoy had approached her with a genuine greeting, she'd decided to do just that.

December 6, 2006, The Staff Room, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Draco startles at Hermione's arrival, looking up quickly from the book he'd been reading, snapping it shut.

"Hello Granger," he drawls. Hermione remains very still, glancing around the room as if trying to decide what to say. Draco begins to worry, knowing all too well that *silence* in Granger's presence is never a good sign. He stares at her, waiting for her to continue.

"I was wondering if you could help me with something," she says quickly, her words blurring together in her rush to get them out.

Her request catches him off guard, Granger has never been one to ask for help. Hell, she doesn't even accept help when it's offered. "Depends on what it is," he replies simply.

"I just need help with some of the Yule Ball planning," she replies, avoiding his gaze.

"Ah, yes," he nods. He briefly recalls that staff meeting from a few weeks prior. He'd hardly paid attention as he began to dread having to chaperone such an event. He's never really been one to care for galas and balls – his mother on the other hand ...

"May I make a suggestion?" he asks. Hermione nods.

"My mother has planned a fair few balls in her time, I'm sure if I was to ask, she would be more than happy to assist," he smiles. He likes the idea of being helpful to Granger, without actually having to hang garland or anything of the sort.

"Oh, er, are you sure?" Hermione begins, clearly uncomfortable. "Is she not ... busy?"

“Granger, if by busy you mean attending teas and luncheons, then yes. Otherwise, my mother has all the time in the world. In fact, it would probably be good for her to have something to keep her occupied.”

Hermione’s first instinct is to thank him, and refuse Narcissa Malfoy’s help. Those pesky feelings of inadequacy start to creep up on her, reminding her that surely she isn’t as brilliant as everyone thinks if she can’t do something as simple as planning a ball.

But she reminds herself that it’s okay to ask for help. She mostly wants to be able to tell her Mind Healer that she’d heeded his advice. Unsurprisingly, Hermione likes being *good* at therapy.

“Okay, yes, that would be lovely, if that’s alright,” Hermione replies.

“I can set up a meeting, perhaps at the new spot in Hogsmeade?” he asks.

Hermione ponders this for a moment, already growing nervous at the prospect of getting coffee with Narcissa Malfoy, *alone* .

“Would you come with me?” she asks suddenly. Draco’s eyes widen slightly, clearly surprised that she would want him in attendance.

“Of course,” he replies simply.

Dearest Mother,

I have a favour to ask. Granger has taken on the responsibility of organizing the entire Yule Ball and has asked for my assistance. As you know, planning social gatherings is not my forté.

I offered your help, as I know planning this sort of thing is like second nature to you. I apologize for putting your name forward without consulting you first, but I was certain that you would be more than willing.

Perhaps the three of us can meet for coffee later this week in Hogsmeade to discuss?

All my love,

Draco

Dearest Draco,

I would be absolutely delighted to help Ms. Granger with such a feat. Has she already decided on a theme? I will contact my usual team immediately. I am assuming it has been scheduled for December 15th, the day before the Holidays?

Tea would be lovely. Perhaps Saturday morning?

Draco, you need not flatter me to request my assistance, I am thrilled that you thought to ask me.

All my love x

December 9th, 2006, The Foggy Bean Café, Hogsmeade

Hermione tries to calm her nerves by pacing nervously outside of the Foggy Bean Café, the newest addition to Hogsmeade's quaint main street. She now regrets promising to meet Malfoy there and making the trip down to the village by herself. She'd thought that some time by herself would be the best route to ease her apprehension, but being left alone with her thoughts seemed to actually have made things worse.

It's not that she's frightened of Narcissa Malfoy – Hermione had come to terms with her few unfortunate encounters with the witch quite a while ago. After all, Narcissa Malfoy is the reason Harry survived and brought about the defeat of Voldemort. Besides, Hermione knows that the witch had only been doing what she needed to – to protect her family.

There had also been their run in a few years prior, one Hermione hadn't been prepared for in the slightest.

July 17th, 2003, Hogsmeade

After arriving via floo at Sirius and Remus's cottage, Hermione greets them both with a swift kiss on the cheek. They shout words of encouragement as she makes the short walk up to the castle, staring in awe at it all the while.

Her mind begins reminiscing, cataloging hundreds of experiences from her time at the school. It feels peculiar, remembering moments of her childhood. Hermione had been having this experience ever since her seventh year – a severe disconnect from her childhood.

Sometimes, when Hermione sees old photographs of herself, she has to convince herself that the girl in the photo is her, and not some nameless child. When she'd returned to her parents' house after the war, she'd found an old photo album. She'd started to mindlessly flip through the pages, staring at the photographs, her eyes narrowed, head tilted to the side. She spent the better part of an hour trying to make her brain comprehend that this experience of looking at photographs is the same as staring at her reflection. She is both herself, and the little girl in the photo all at once, but the little girl is not her.

It's strange, she thinks, that as a child, your existence seems almost innumerable because you needn't worry about the time passing. Time is your friend when you're a child, a simple concept to help you move through your days.

Your childhood passes by at a creeping pace, the days bleeding into one another. But then suddenly, you're no longer a child, and as you stare up at the place where you spent your best days, and realize that time doesn't move slowly anymore. Because for every year that you're alive, your perception of time shifts, a year seeming much shorter after you've already lived twenty-three of them. Your existence is no longer conceptualized in days, weeks, and months but rather in *years* which morph into periods of time.

Your childhood memories feel so clear, so vivid. Brighter even than your memories from but a week ago. It's a peculiar sensation, to remember a cold winter's morning from when you were seven more clearly than the day prior. It's an experience that is both melancholic and beautiful all at the same time.

Walking up to Hogwarts evokes this sensation in Hermione's heart, it clenching slightly as she realizes that her childhood is long gone. But, she quickly disregards the sensation, determined to make this day a positive experience.

She knows that this interview is a mere formality, McGonagall – or rather Minerva – had all but offered her the position in her latest letter.

After completing her second mastery, Hermione realized that she couldn't keep hiding from *real-life* any longer. Besides, someone had once told her that she would make an excellent professor – something she had recently begun to believe.

When Minerva had owled her two days prior, detailing Professor Flitwick's long-awaited retirement, Hermione had cried – *happy tears*, of course.

She'd been dreading the prospect of working at the ministry, even the more sought-after positions like becoming an unspeakable. She's well aware of the fact that she would be hired on the spot, most likely in a much higher position than entry-level. No, *getting* a job isn't the problem – it's getting a job that she will genuinely enjoy, rather than dread.

Hermione is actually frightened of falling into the monotony of a nine-to-five job, of living the same life every single day for the rest of her life. She admires those that can do it, but she knows that sitting in a little cubicle, completing meaningless tasks all day would drive her positively barmy. She also hates politics, so there's that.

So, when Hermione realizes that there is a vacancy at Hogwarts in her chosen field, she shed a few tears, because it finally felt as if the stars were aligning in her favour. The timing had been too perfect to pass up.

As she enters the castle's grounds, the wards admitting her with a warm tingle, she smiles. She'd missed the old castle, its towers and courtyards, the greenhouses and lake. It all feels so familiar, so comforting. It feels like *home*.

Hermione takes a deep breath as she steps into the Entrance Hall. Memories rush back to her, the scenes unfolding as if in a Pensieve in front of her. Sneaking outside under the invisibility cloak, using her time-turner to save Buckbeak and Sirius, her grand entrance to the Yule Ball.

Everything feels the same – like nothing has changed and no time has passed since her childhood in these corridors. Not true of course, everything has changed, and she is no longer a young girl filled with naive optimism.

She begins the familiar trek to Gryffindor tower, coming to a halt in front of what used to be McGonagall's office. However, as she stands there she realizes that her head of house would no longer inhabit the space. Pivoting, she makes her way toward the Headmaster's – or rather the Headmistress's office.

She stands in front of the gargoyle with a frown, realizing she hasn't a clue what the password is. "Er, hello, I'm here to see Headmistress McGonagall," she announces to the statue. The statue, unsurprisingly, doesn't budge an inch.

Hermione feels rather stupid, standing hopelessly in front of the statue. She begins rattling off various wizarding candies, hoping that one of them will still be the password.

“Sugar Quills,” she tries eventually, the Gargoyle suddenly moving. She smiles, praising her own ingenuity. But, as she notices that someone is descending the stone staircase, she realizes it was not her feeble attempts at guessing the password that caused the statue to spin.

She thanks Merlin regardless, not wanting to be late for her interview. However, as the Gargoyle comes to a stop, her eyes go wide.

“Hello, Ms. Granger,” the witch smiles.

“Hello, Madam Malfoy,” she replies, quickly becoming anxious that Madam is the incorrect title for the witch.

“Please, call me Narcissa,” she smiles kindly.

“Oh, well it’s nice to see you, Narcissa,” Hermione says quickly.

“Welcome back to England, Ms. Granger, I daresay wizarding Britain missed you,” she replies, her intonation precise and crisp.

“Hermione,” Hermione blurts out. “You can call me Hermione,” she adds, embarrassed.

“Well, Hermione, it is lovely to see you,” the blonde witch grins. Hermione notices her casually glancing toward her left hand, causing her to quickly pull her sleeve over her scar.

Mudblood.

She wonders if the witch is attempting to see it, perhaps out of guilt regarding her involvement, or lack thereof in the situation.

However, as Hermione begins the ascent toward Minerva’s office, Narcissa smiles to herself. She hadn’t been looking at Hermione’s scar, she’d been attempting to discern if there was a ring on her finger.

December 9th, 2006, The Foggy Bean Café, Hogsmeade

As Draco rounds the bend, he pauses for a moment to smile at the sight before him. He’s always found it quite entertaining to watch Granger pace, loving the way that she mumbles to herself under her breath, brow furrowed.

He loves the way the witch truly wears her emotions on her sleeve, finding it to be quite refreshing after a life surrounded by Slytherins. While it isn’t necessarily a bad thing for people to keep their emotions guarded for the sake of self-preservation, Draco does enjoy the transparency that Hermione seems to maintain.

Though, he supposes the average person may not notice the small indicators of her mood, like the way her nose scrunches when she’s confused, or the way she’ll cross her arms if she’s annoyed. Over time, Draco has unintentionally catalogued these indicators and consequently wondered why no one else seems to have taken the time to notice.

All too often, he would look across the Great Hall, his eyes falling conveniently on Granger at the Gryffindor table. He had selected this seat in particular for that very reason – *the view* . Sometimes, he would notice her sitting in silence, staring off into the distance with her eyes glazed over. But,

when he'd check to see if her friends had noticed, they never had. This would agitate him, because in another life, perhaps he would be the one to ask her how she's doing, maybe even try to make her smile. He couldn't understand for the life of him why her so-called friends never seemed to notice when the witch was acting, unlike her usual talkative self.

As he watches Hermione, he realizes that her pacing isn't due to confusion, or anger, but *anxiety*. While he'd anticipated that she surely wouldn't be eager to meet with his mother, he also hadn't realized that it would bring her such anxiousness. Sometimes he forgets that to everyone besides him, Narcissa Malfoy can be considered *frightening*.

"Granger," he smiles, offering her a short nod.

Her head snaps up, eyes wide. "Malfoy!"

"Are you ok?" he asks carefully.

"Of course, yeah, I'm great!" she replies, plastering a fake smile on her face.

"Your pacing suggests otherwise," he winks, attempting to lighten the situation, maybe even make the witch laugh.

Hermione blanches for a moment, clearly shocked by his assessment. "Shall we head in?" she asks, eager to get this meeting over with.

But, as she turns toward the door, she feels his hand gently grip her arm, just above the elbow. "Granger," he says, his voice low.

Hermione can feel her stomach start to flutter as she turns to face him once more. She tries to not think about the contact he'd established between them, though actively trying not to think about it seems to only increase her awareness of the feeling of his fingers on her.

"I'm here with you, don't worry," he smiles. For some reason, Hermione finds this statement to actually calm her nerves substantially. She allows herself to forget their past for just a moment, relishing in the feeling of *him*. She smiles at him with a full, toothy grin before guiding them inside.

Narcissa Malfoy is of course, already seated at a table. She's wearing an expertly tailored set of dark purple robes with her hair twisted into an elegant updo. Her legs are pressed together, her knees leaning together to the side. Her posture alone is evidence of her aristocratic upbringing, her very presence causing those around her to feel the need to sit a little straighter than usual.

As Hermione and Draco enter the space, the blonde witch's eyes light up the moment she notices them. They weave through the tables toward her, and Hermione suddenly starts to worry about whether or not she'll be expected to curtsy.

Narcissa stands, greeting her son with an alarmingly intense hug. "Draco, darling, how glad I am to see you," she gushes, pulling her son's face into her hands and giving it a squeeze.

"And Hermione, a pleasure as always," she beams turning toward Hermione.

"It's nice to see you again, Madam Malfoy," Hermione replies carefully.

"Narcissa, darling, as previously discussed," she smiles, her eyes twinkling. Draco's mind takes off, attempting to recall when his mother had had a chance to speak with Granger, and somehow be on

a first-name basis.

“Shall we?” Narcissa asks, gesturing to the table. Hermione nods, taking the seat to Narcissa’s left. Before Draco can sit, however, Narcissa waves him away, “Draco darling, be a dear and fetch our coffees,” she smiles.

“Now,” Narcissa smiles, conjuring a large organized folder out of nowhere. “I have already arranged for all my usual people to join us,” she begins, flipping to the first section of the folder.

“These are the briefs for the elves, for the catering,” she explains, placing a stack of papers before Hermione. Hermione silently nods.

“Now, I wanted your input, but I believe that the usual ice theme is rather passé, might I suggest an alternative?” Hermione nods once more, fully intending to agree with absolutely whatever the witch suggests. “Winter woodland, it’s ever so romantic.”

“Yes, that sounds lovely,” Hermione smiles.

“I’m glad you agree,” Narcissa smiles, levitating a large page of sketches out of the folder. “Here are the drawings I had my interior decorator design.”

Hermione's eyes widen at the sight of the beautifully intricate and realistic designs. Thin frost-bitten trees wrapped in fairy lights line the room, their foliage hanging overhead. The artist had drawn fake snow falling, with gorgeous wooden tables. Each table’s place settings are composed of hues of dark greens and rich reds, with berries and fir as centrepieces.

Tall lamp posts line a walkway toward the dance floor, their lights flickering under the moonlight. It reminds Hermione of Narnia, causing her to smile.

“This is fantastic, Narcissa, thank you,” she beams.

“As for music, Draco mentioned your band cancelled, yes?” she asks.

“Yes,” Hermione admits, slightly embarrassed.

“No matter, I have already booked my usual orchestra.”

Hermione has to stifle a laugh, the fact that the Malfoys have a *usual orchestra* acting as a reminder of just how wealthy they are. The witch had suggested this as if booking an entire orchestra is as simple as ordering takeaway for dinner.

Draco returns to the table, levitating three cups of coffee in front of him. The first is placed in front of his mother, a simple black coffee. Next, is Hermione’s, her usual latte. She smiles when she notices the flower that had been drawn in her milk foam.

“Did you get yourself a picture?” she asks with a grin, hoping he’ll understand the reference.

“Of course I did, Granger, I’m not one to deny myself life’s simple pleasures,” he replies with a grin. Narcissa finds herself smiling as she watches the two interact, silently praying that her son gets his act together sooner rather than later.

“Hermione and I were just discussing the decor, music, and catering, Draco,” Narcissa says suddenly, taking great joy in observing how Draco has to pull his eyes away from the curly-haired

witch across from him.

“Oh, yes,” he nods, clearly uninterested.

Narcissa had read his letter asking for assistance three times before showing it to Lucius to confirm that she understood Draco’s request. Her son had never shown any kind of interest in party planning whatsoever, in fact, he only ever expressed a dislike for the topic.

After Lucius had confirmed that Draco was indeed attempting to help plan the Yule Ball, Narcissa realized that her son isn’t just interested in the muggleborn witch, viewing her as an option among many.

No, she now knows for certain that her son has his mind made up – because when a Malfoy wizard meets the love of his life, his usually selfish and cold demeanour melts away, leaving only pure adoration in its wake. She can remember all too well how shocked their fellow Slytherins had been, when Lucius Malfoy started carrying her books to class and gladly carrying out any request she’d made.

After discussing other aspects of the planning process that would have never even crossed Hermione’s mind, she excuses herself to the lavatory.

The minute she’s out of earshot, Narcissa’s expression shifts. “Draco,” she smiles, attempting to make eye contact with her son.

“Yes mother,” he deadpans, undoubtedly having noticed his mother’s shift in demeanour.

“I trust you are doing your best to regain Ms. Granger’s favour?” she asks casually.

“No mother, I’m trying actually trying to push her further away, hence my willingness to attend this meeting with the planning committee,” he replies dryly.

“I can tell the two of you have a special connection,” she smiles, choosing to ignore her son’s perturbed attitude.

“Yes, mother I am well aware.”

“Have you asked her to accompany you to the Ball?” Narcissa asks, her tone suddenly serious.

Draco remains silent for a moment, mostly because he’d forgotten that professors would often arrive at the ball with an escort as well. “Not yet,” he replies simply.

“Well, be quick about it. She’s quite the catch; somebody else might ask her.”

Draco feels his stomach drop, realizing that there is one wizard in particular who may ask Granger to the ball for *old-time’s sake*.

“I will, mother,” he replies quickly, noticing Hermione weaving her way back toward the table. Draco stands out of habit, his pureblood manners forcing him to his feet. Hermione stares at him, clearly confused.

“Thank you for meeting with us, Narcissa,” Hermione grins. “I am so thankful for your help. Planning this sort of thing certainly isn’t my forté,” she laughs.

“It’s my pleasure, Hermione, I am always happy to help,” she smiles. “I will floo back to the Manor from here; I’ll see you both the day of the ball.”

The walk back to the castle happens in comfortable silence. Hermione has always enjoyed that Draco doesn’t feel the need to fill the silence with aimless chatter. Now, Hermione has always been a chatty person, especially if someone gets her on a topic she’s particularly passionate about. But, over time she’s learned that her incessant rambling is often a part of the act she’s so accustomed to maintaining.

It wasn’t until she left Hogwarts that she realized that she quite enjoys comfortable silence, and for some reason, Draco’s presence has allowed her to drop this act of hers and simply *be*.

Her mind begins to wander toward the ball, and how thankful she is for Narcissa’s assistance. However, somewhere in the back of her mind, a thought begins to form, gain momentum, and speed toward her consciousness. She feels silly even pondering the possibility, but she can’t help but hope that Malfoy will ask her to accompany him to the Yule Ball.

A few weeks ago, she would have scoffed at this idea, reminding herself that he was the one who had cut things off with her. She’s been convinced that he wasn’t interested in her in the slightest, that their whole relationship – if it could even be considered as such – was all an elaborate ruse. But lately, she’d been wondering if this previous assessment remained true.

Sometimes, she would catch him staring at her from across the Staff Room, or making silly excuses to visit her office. There was also the whole hand-holding fiasco of the week prior.

So, while Hermione tries to not get her hopes up, she enjoys pondering the possibility that maybe Draco Malfoy misses her just as much as she misses him.

Missed Chances

Chapter Notes

As always, beta love ♥ to whits_end & a huge thank you to likelyunfinished and calcalypso for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

Hope you love this chapter, the next one should be posted soon as well!

P.S. its NaNoWriMo! I'm currently working on a short holiday fic as well, so follow me on tiktok and insta (@embersofapril) for updates :)

Draco is certain that he would rather be doing almost anything other than the task he is about to take on. He watches as all the fifth, sixth, and seventh-year Slytherin students slowly file into the unused classroom, eagerly muttering amongst themselves. Draco remembers all too well the anticipation of the Yule Ball, how eager all his fellow students had been to finally have a good reason to speak with the witch or wizard they had their eyes on.

Draco, of course, hadn't even allowed himself to consider the deluded notion that he would ever be able to attend the ball with the witch he'd been lusting after. But when he'd watched her walk down the stairs into the Entrance Hall, a soft glow seemed to surround her. He'd wished that he'd tossed caution to the wind and asked her anyway.

He knows she likely would have punched him in the face again, assuming his offer to be some cruel joke. But honestly, Draco would have been happy to have her come into contact with him once more, even if it is in the form of a punch.

He wonders if maybe the 0.0001% chance that she would have said yes could have been his reality if he'd had the balls to ask. But no matter, the fates had intervened for his benefit and offered him a second chance – another Yule Ball.

And this time, Draco will be damned if he doesn't attend with Granger on his arm.

He looks around the room searching for the Slytherin Head Girl, the one who is meant to help him facilitate this short meeting. Cassie appears to be missing in action, something that concerns Draco because the girl is never late.

Cassie is, of course, running late *with a purpose* .

She'd been on her way to the location that Professor Malfoy had posted on the Slytherin bulletin board earlier that day when she'd been struck by a *brilliant* idea.

After a slight detour to the Charms corridor, she knocks impatiently on Hermione's office door. The charms professor swings the door open a short second after, her expression shifting from confusion to joy.

“Hey Cass,” she smiles.

Now, Cassie had run through various stories that she could use to convince Hermione to come to the Slytherin meeting with her, ranging from a student duel to a pregnant sixth year, but eventually, she’d landed on something quite simple.

“Elizabeth was asking for you,” she explains quickly. “Come with me!”

Hermione hastens after Cassie at once, clearly worried about the first-year muggleborn. Her mind begins to spin, conceptualizing all the awful things that could have occurred to Elizabeth. Is she being bullied? Failing a class? Missing home?

Hermione’s thoughts occupy her until Cassie comes to a sudden halt in front of a classroom door.

“I’m sorry, Mione, I lied. Elizabeth is fine,” she smiles hesitantly.

“Cassandra!” Hermione exclaims. “Why on earth would you lie to me? You can always tell me the truth.”

“It’s for your own good, Mione,” Cassie explains with a devilish grin as she opens the classroom door.

Hermione balks the moment she steps into the room, realizing quite quickly *what* Cassie had led her to. On one side of the room are all the Slytherin girls from fifth through seventh year. Across from them are the boys. Both groups appear to feel quite differently about the announcement that Professor Malfoy is in the midst of making.

“This Friday is the Yule Ball, a longstanding tradition of events such as the International Confederation of Wizards Champion that we are hosting this year. This means, that *much to my displeasure* , every student fifth year and above will be permitted to attend.”

The girls begin to whisper excitedly to one another, stealing glances at the perturbed wizards across the room from them.

“But know this, if you act in any way that is not in accordance with the values of our house, or the guidelines I will be outlining *at length* over the next several minutes, you will be bringing shame to not only yourself but all of those who came before you in the Noble House of Slytherin.”

Hermione rolls her eyes at this, finding Malfoy’s dramatics to be quite comical. She remains at the back of the class, hidden from his sight. She’s not entirely sure why Cassie brought her here, but she has her suspicions, each more outlandish than the next.

“First rule,” Malfoy begins, pointing his wand at the chalkboard behind him.

“You will not, under any circumstances, sneak off into the bushes somewhere with your date or any other young witch or wizard. I and the other professors will be on patrol the entire evening, and if you are caught...” he pauses, likely for dramatic effect.

“I will be writing to your parents *personally* , to inform them of your indiscretion.” Draco knows this is likely overkill, but he remembers his own Yule Ball all too well. He himself had been found amongst the bushes, Pansy Parkinson’s incessant whining acting as a shrill beacon for Snape to find them.

He is also well aware of the fact that the only thing Slytherins fear is their parents' disappointment.

Hermione finds that she's quite enjoying watching Malfoy lecture the students. He makes his way efficiently through a list of eight rules, ranging from the consumption of substances to the types of robes that are appropriate for such an event.

Her mind becomes hazy as her gaze locks on the Potions Professor. His professor's robes really are sinful, she decides. A curl falls loose, tumbling into his eyesight, causing him to push his fingers through his hair to set it back in place.

He stands tall, his broad frame commanding the attention of all those present. But of all the features that Professor Malfoy possesses, the one that she enjoys the most is his voice. His smooth, cinnamon voice is posh, though over the years it's lost the holier-than-thou tone that it once had.

While Hermione's mind turns to smoke, her eyes locked on the Slytherin Head of the House, Cassie puts her plan into action.

It's not until Professor Malfoy arrives at the demonstration portion of this demonstration that he realizes he's without a partner. His face briefly flashes an expression of helplessness, realizing that he'd really rather not dance with any of the students.

Cassie approaches him, and he balks, worrying that the Head Girl is offering herself as his dancing partner. "I brought Mione," she says under her breath, peering at the back of the class where she'd left her godmother.

Draco nods, thankful for Cassie's foresight. "Professor Granger?" he asks, his tone hopeful.

Hermione exits the cursed trance she had fallen victim to the moment she hears him address her, slowly making her way to the front of the class. She hadn't really been paying attention to what he'd been saying, and quickly worries that he plans to have her reinforce one of his rules.

But, as she approaches him, he bows, dipping his blonde head toward the floor. One arm is tucked behind his back, the other bent – his hand over his heart. When he raises his head once more, Hermione swears that time slows, his motions occurring at a glacial pace.

He extends his hand toward her with a hesitant smile. She accepts, placing her palm delicately in his. Many of the girls to their left begin to grin as they observe the pair, already whispering to one another about *how romantic it would be* for their two professors to fall in love.

Cassie stands to the side with a devilish grin on her face, quite pleased with herself.

After they join their arms together in the starting position – Draco's right hand coming up to rest on her shoulder blade, their opposite hands joined with their elbows elevated – Hermione's mind spins, attempting to remember the steps of a waltz. But, as the gramophone comes to life, Draco steps forward with his left foot, landing softly on his heel and rolling slowly to the ball of his foot. In unison, Hermione steps backward with her right foot, keeping her upper body straight and relaxed.

Draco begins to lead her through the motions as they complete a full box step, gliding around the space with ease. He can sense his mind slip into a state of almost-ecstasy, relishing in the feel of Granger's hand against his, his palm gently against her back.

The scent of strawberries and honey wafts toward him. His mind begins to wander, transporting him back to a morning he's been thinking about quite frequently as of late.

December 13, 2000, King Street, Oxford

As the sunlight begins to peak through the window of Hermione's flat, Draco smiles. He's always dreamed of waking up next to the curly-haired witch beside him. But, as it turns out, the scenes his imagination had conjured up seem pale in comparison to the real thing.

The beams of sunlight create a warm glow around the room, though one ray, in particular, has landed perfectly on Hermione as she sleeps, resembling an aura of gold. Draco thinks it's fitting, that the sun shines its light upon the witch, illuminating her in even the simplest of moments.

He remains silent, his breathing steady, not wanting to wake her. She looks so peaceful when she sleeps, he thinks. He momentarily worries that it could be considered creepy to be observing her while she's unaware of it, but eventually decides that it's okay – she had invited him to sleep over the evening prior after all.

Draco decides that his favourite place on earth is likely Granger's bed, and not for the reason one may think. Draco's fondness is of course partly due to his proximity to the witch, but also because he's completely enveloped by his favourite smell.

Honey and Strawberries.

As he's gotten to know Hermione better, he's realized that the strawberry scent originates from her shampoo. He'd hypothesized that this was the case, and had his suspicions confirmed the week prior when he'd taken a shower at her flat.

And no, it wasn't for the reason he wishes it was.

December 6, 2000, King Street, Oxford

Upon his arrival home from Quidditch practice, Draco discovers the rather unfortunate fact that the water in his flat isn't working. With a frown and various expletives muttered under his breath, he taps his wand on the faucet, attempting to summon some water.

Of course, muggle plumbing isn't very responsive to the waving of wands, so nothing occurs. At first, Draco grows upset, mostly because he realizes he'll have to somehow contact his muggle landlord. But, then he realizes that this is actually quite an excellent opportunity.

As he makes his way back toward the hall, he stops in front of the mirror by his door to ruffle his hair ever so slightly. Summoning an air of confidence, he takes the two small steps across the hall and knocks firmly on Granger's door. It's certainly quite early for a weekday, but he knows that the witch will already be awake.

His Quidditch practices occur at 5:30 in the morning two days a week, a wake-up time he still isn't accustomed to despite this being his routine for the past three months. Sometimes, when he returns home just before seven, he can hear Granger rummaging around in her flat. The ruckus ranged from singing muggle songs to herself or her use of various muggle appliances.

Suddenly, the door swings open, and Draco has to do everything in his power to stop himself from gaping at the witch standing before him.

As it happens, Hermione was in the middle of practicing yoga, a new hobby that she'd taken on in an attempt to help with her stress levels and mindfulness. Her Mind Healer had recommended it, citing various benefits of the practice.

Hermione had, of course, taken out several books on the topic, determined to learn all she could about this new hobby of hers. She had decided that she wanted to practice the art how it was originally intended – by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in Northern India over 5,000 years ago.

She'd found fascinating texts that referenced the connection between yoga and alchemy, sending her into a four-day-long hyper fixation on the topic. The desire of yoga to transmute the body into a worthy vessel was inspired in part by the alchemical explorations of turning lead into gold. One wizard, Georg Feuerstein even suggested that yoga is simply spiritual alchemy: the act of transmuting impure matter – the human body and mind – into pure gold, the immortal spiritual essence.

Hermione had grown quite fond of the practice, finding that yoga has begun to take on a dual purpose in her life. On one hand, it's proven to be excellent for her mental well-being and physical fitness. However, the connections that she'd been able to form between the practice and alchemy are what has her hooked.

On this fine December morning, Hermione is dressed in muggle fitness attire: a pink sports bra and black leggings. As Draco allows his eyes to shamelessly take in the sight, he once again reminds himself of just how much he loves muggle fashions.

Wizarding robes are generally quite loose, never form-fitting. There's a certain level of modesty that's expected within the magical community – especially from witches.

He can still remember the first time he'd seen Granger in muggle denims, the experience awakening something in him that he hadn't anticipated. This ensemble of tight-fitting clothing leaves little to the imagination, and for that, Draco counts his lucky stars.

What a wonderful idea, he thinks, to have come over here at this precise moment.

He notices some kind of rubber rug on the floor, and a contraption blowing steam into the room. "Granger? What are you doing?" he asks, wondering if she is attempting some kind of ritual.

"Yoga," she smiles, opening the door, and inviting him to enter. Draco quite enjoys Hermione's flat, finding it to be exceptionally cozy. He likes her cluttered bookshelves, filled to the brim with both long-time favourites and yet-to-be-reads, her old quilts and slightly tattered pillows, her hanging plants, and half-burnt candles.

"And yoga is?" he asks, hoping that he can send Granger off on a tangent so he can appreciate her current attire for a little longer.

"Yoga is a mind and body practice. Various styles of yoga combine physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation," the witch begins in her signature swotty tone. Draco can easily discern that she is citing directly from a book.

“It’s an ancient practice that originated in Northern India over 5000 years ago. It involves movement, meditation, and breathing techniques to promote mental and physical well-being,” she smiles, clearly pleased with herself.

“Sounds like a bunch of hogwash,” Draco teases, loving how Hermione’s expression becomes aghast at his statement.

“You should try it,” she suggests, “it’s very good for your mental well-being and flexibility.” Draco quickly reins in his train of thought, not wanting images of Granger and her flexibility to cloud his mind.

“I was wondering if I might use your shower,” he asks, ignoring her suggestion.

“Oh, is yours broken?” she asks.

“Yes, I’ll have to contact the landlord later,” he explains.

“And how do you plan to do that?” Hermione asks, clearly amused.

“Well, I was hoping I could borrow your telephone,” he replies sheepishly avoiding her gaze.

“We can get you your own if you want,” she suggests.

Draco grimaces at this, not wanting to purchase a device that will only lead to him feeling stupid. “Perhaps,” he replies dryly.

“But yes, of course, you can use my shower,” she smiles. “The towels on the back of the door are clean, you can use my soaps and whatnot.”

With that, she turns back to her peculiar rubber rug, takes a seat and closes her eyes. Draco watches, transfixed as the witch crosses her legs over one another, her knees bent. Hermione peeks one eye open, noticing that the wizard is still in the main room.

“Did you need anything else?” she asks.

“No, er, thanks Granger,” he smiles, heading to the bathroom. He finds it odd being in her flat at times, seeing as it is the exact same layout as his own, only flipped. As he closes the door behind him, he releases a breath, leaning his forehead against the wooden door.

“Get it together,” he mutters.

Outside, Hermione finds it rather difficult to focus on her meditation. She’d been doing so well at clearing her mind, practicing occulemency all the while. She’s now managed up to twenty-five minutes of pure meditation, a feat she is quite proud of.

But right now, all her mind seems to be able to focus on is Draco in his godforsaken quidditch robes. The navy blue colour of the Oxford uniforms suits him, she thinks. The sweater hugs his torso in all the right places, the physical fitness training broadening his shoulders substantially.

She’d been fortunate enough to see him a few times here and there in his quidditch attire, but something about seeing him wearing the oxford colours *in her flat* is a different experience entirely. She had felt herself practically salivating when she’d opened the door and her eyes fell on his form.

She'd attended one of his games a few weeks prior, travelling via floo to the stadium tucked away and hidden from muggles in the Oxfordshire countryside. He'd jogged off the pitch after the game, approaching her with a genuine grin on his face, beginning to recount various plays. He'd been practically glowing in excitement, an emotion that Hermione didn't see the wizard showcase very often.

Upon realizing just how happy it made her to see *him* happy, Hermione admitted a fact to herself that she'd been ignoring for many months.

She'd moved far past the point of being *just friends* with Draco.

She wanted more. Much more.

December 10th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

When the music comes to a stop, Draco releases a long breath. Time feels as if it's come to a standstill, an eon in a moment, allowing him to stare into the eyes of the witch before him. Draco cherishes the proximity they share, welcoming the sensation of calmness that falls over him.

Something about being in Granger's presence, close enough that he can count her individual freckles, and admire the small specks of gold in her eyes has always had this effect on him.

Tranquillity.

Home.

He'd missed this feeling. Granger's back pressed firmly against his palm is enough to evoke the sensation he hadn't felt for many years now.

Until Oxford, he'd always considered Malfoy Manor to be home. The endless grounds, the stream with the stepping stones, his favourite willow tree, and the horse stables. The Manor still is Draco's home, in a traditional sense at least. But, ever since he'd experienced Hermione's embrace, Draco's definition of *home* had shifted.

Suddenly, the feeling of longing for one's home was no longer filled with visions of the Manor, but a curly-haired witch with a smile on her face. Rather than the scent of polished silver, a summer breeze, and his father's cologne reminding him of home, it became strawberries, honey, and coffee.

Until this very moment, the two of them spinning around the room together, oblivious to the reactions of those around them, Draco had been feeling homesick without even realizing it. He'd felt empty over the past few years as if he was stranded in a river, the current carrying him forward with nothing to grab ahold of.

He hadn't been able to identify the root cause of this feeling of emptiness. But as he smiles at the witch before him, the Slytherin students bursting into applause, Draco knows for certain that he'll do whatever it takes to feel at home once more.

Hermione had returned to her living quarters in an absolute tizzy. After their brief dance, she'd been certain that Malfoy would casually suggest that they attend the ball together as Chaperones. The situation had quite literally been the perfect segue.

But, of course, he hadn't.

Hermione starts to worry.

Maybe she'd overestimated their connection.

Maybe he really *wasn't interested* after all.

Maybe he found her positively repulsive and was only being civil because they're colleagues.

Her train of thought takes off, barrelling through all common sense and critical thinking, spiralling and snowballing until Hermione is wholly convinced that Malfoy actually loathes her very existence. She knows this isn't true – deep down. But her brain has always enjoyed trying to convince her that the worst-case scenario is the most likely to occur.

December 11th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Hermione stares at the vacant seat next to her, confused as to why Malfoy is absent. He isn't one to miss mealtimes. She'd become accustomed to his presence in the Great Hall – his pureblood etiquette at work as he expertly cuts into his roast or places his serviette on his lap. Sometimes, he would complain about his students, a topic Hermione is always more than happy to discuss. Sometimes he would discuss potions he was experimenting with or new patents that Theo is filing.

Sometimes, he remains silent, quite content to listen to Hermione's ramblings. She hadn't realized how much she truly values his presence until his seat sits empty.

So, after finishing the lovely roast the elves had prepared, she takes off at a brisk pace toward the dungeons. She's not sure why she feels the need to find the Professor, nor why she's so concerned with his comings and goings, but she chooses to not question her motives for the time being.

When she arrives at Malfoy's office, she knocks carefully, quickly taking a step back. She isn't quite sure what she plans to say when he opens the door, but she's hoping that she'll come up with something witty on the spot.

But, after a moment of waiting and anxiously tapping her foot on the stone floor, no one comes to fetch the door. Frowning, she turns toward the Potions classroom.

The door is slightly ajar, but as she opens it ever so slightly, she quickly retreats, her eyes going wide. There, in the potions classroom is Jocelyne Williams. The American witch is perched quite comfortably on one of the stools, her head tossed back in laughter.

Hermione hadn't been able to see Malfoy's expression, but she didn't need to. She too has had the pleasure of being on the receiving end of Malfoy's flirty banter.

Is Malfoy interested in Jocelyne?

Have they been *seeing one another*?

Had Malfoy asked her to attend the Yule Ball with him?

Embarrassment begins to sweep over Hermione's mind, her cheeks turning scarlet as she makes her way through the corridors. The last thing she wants is a repeat of the last Yule Ball, pining after a

wizard that wants nothing to do with her. She refuses to be a second choice, an afterthought, a last resort.

So, she does what any sane witch would do. She decides to take matters into her own hands.

Though her previous attempt at evoking jealousy in sixth year had gone awry, she remains convinced that she'll be in control of the situation this time. Well, she hopes that this will be the case.

Hermione hadn't interacted with Viktor Krum very frequently since his arrival. She'd crossed paths with him a handful of times, always offering a small wave and smile. He'd approached her during meal times here and there, always placing a delicate kiss on her hand as he dips his head into a bow.

Regardless, Hermione is certain that if she raises the topic of the Yule Ball to the Bulgarian wizard, she will leave the conversation with a date. Whether this date will be with Malfoy or Viktor, however, remains unknown.

And conveniently, the perfect opportunity for such a conversation will be taking place the very next day.

December 12th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Four short days before the Yule Ball, Hermione dresses in her best robes. They're a lovely shade of midnight blue, the neckline dipping a bit further than her usual teaching robes.

The moment her classes had finished, she'd ushered the students who were dillydallying in her classroom into the hall, determined to freshen up before that evening's staff meeting.

Seeing as the Yule Ball was fast approaching, she'd organized this short meeting to review the expectations for all members of staff. This, of course, includes the eight visiting Professors, and most importantly, Viktor.

Hermione saunters back into the Charms classroom at quarter to five. She verifies that she has all her booklets, one for each of the members of staff. She casts a quick scourgify on all the desks, not wanting one of the Professors to come into contact with something unsavoury left behind by one of her students.

The Professors all begin to file in a short moment later, chatting amongst themselves. Hermione takes a deep breath as she notices Malfoy's signature blonde hair enter the room. She tries to remain casual, and not even glance in his direction. Though, she does hope that he notices that she's wearing the robes he'd once admitted he finds "breathtaking."

Her hopes are quickly squashed, however, the moment that Jocelyne enters the room directly behind him. Hermione has to stop herself from scowling, Jocelyne's simpering briefly transporting her back to sixth year and the whole Lavender Brown fiasco.

However, Hermione refuses to let this situation dampen her spirits. She isn't some star-eyed schoolgirl, lusting after a wizard who will never return her affections any longer. She conducts the meeting in a trance, passing out the booklets with the flick of her wand. She assures that all of the members of staff are aware of their patrol routes, and explains the proceedings of the evening.

Once the meeting is concluded, all of the Professors turn to one another, gossiping animatedly about the week they'd been having thus far. Hermione had almost forgotten how terrifying hormonal teenagers could be.

In the past two days alone, she'd broken up a fight between two sixth-year Ravenclaws arguing over a witch, confiscated a love potion from a teary-eyed Hufflepuff, and consoled a seventh-year Gryffindor who had been rejected by the "*witch of his dreams*."

All the Professors appear to have had similar experiences, Neville in particular. Gryffindors seem to be taking the whole process to new heights, and as the Head of Gryffindor house, Neville had already acted as a moderator between brawling students three separate times in just one morning.

As she listens to Neville's story, she weaves her way toward Viktor who is in the process of explaining a complicated quidditch play to Professor Sakurai. The second that he notices Hermione headed in his direction, however, the conversation ceases immediately.

"Professor Granger," he smiles, his eyes kind. Sometimes Hermione wishes that she was more attracted to the Bulgarian wizard, well aware that it would likely make her life far easier than pining after a wizard who apparently wants nothing to do with her.

"Hello Viktor," she grins, purposefully using the wizard's given name. She perches herself on the desk next to him, flipping her hair over her shoulder.

"How are you?" she asks casually, attempting to commence a lengthy conversation, thereby increasing the likelihood of Draco noticing.

"I am doing well, I am enjoying being in your presence once more," he replies.

"Well, I'm glad you're here," she smiles, leaning forward slightly. She glances over her shoulder momentarily to verify whether or not Draco had noticed their conversation yet.

Much to her displeasure, Draco hasn't noticed at all. In fact, he is in the middle of a conversation of his own. *With Jocelyne.*

Draco grows more and more annoyed with every word that exits Jocelyne's mouth. He isn't sure what he had done, to earn such torment. For some reason, the American witch had begun to corner him at every opportunity taking advantage of his pureblood manners and boring him to death with her incessant flirting.

At first, he'd assumed her inquiries to be good-natured. She'd approached him with a potions-related question, one he was all too happy to answer. However, his eagerness to discuss potions had likely been misinterpreted, the witch assuming that his eagerness was caused by her, rather than the topic at hand.

Now, she finds him almost every day, cornering him in his classroom, or falling into step with him on the grounds.

As the witch rambles on, her distinct California accent begins to turn into a hum as Draco focuses his attention elsewhere. Just behind Jocelyne is a witch whose voice he much prefers, one he would like to listen to all day in fact.

However, he is staring not with the look of admiration he usually does, but one of worry.

He'd been planning to speak with Granger after the meeting, perhaps ask her to accompany him on a short stroll. Then, he'd ask the question, casually of course. He'd even practiced in front of his mirror that morning.

His worry continues to grow and metastasize as he observes Hermione smiling at Krum, placing her hand gently on his arm. He stands suddenly, ignoring Jocelyne entirely. His steps are assured as he approaches Hermione, "Granger, might I speak with you for a moment?" he asks.

"See you then," Hermione smiles in Krum's direction. Her eyes linger for a moment before she turns to face Malfoy.

Draco feels his stomach drop, had Hermione been telling Krum that she would see him then, as in *at the Ball*? The confidence that he had established during the few short steps to arrive where he now stands quickly evaporates.

He'd missed his chance.

Mother is going to kill me, he thinks.

"Sure," she smiles, straightening her robes. The pair make their way out of the classroom in silence, though both have resorted to quiet for entirely different reasons.

Hermione remains physically silent, though her mind is anything but. She's wondering how Malfoy will ask her. Perhaps his pureblood upbringing will take the reins, maybe with a bow and a kiss on the hand. Or, perhaps he'll be playful, and ask her with a grin.

Hermione is silent because she's overjoyed with anticipation. Draco, however, is silent because the feeling of dread and disappointment plaguing his mind has become far too much to bear.

As the pair emerge into the night, Hermione takes in a deep breath of the crisp air, silently casting a warming charm overhead. She feels as if she should say something, to start the conversation. Yet, she's also worried that if she starts rambling, Draco will never find a chance to ask.

If he's even intending to ask, she reminds herself. Hermione feels conflicted because while she wants to remain hopeful regarding the situation, she also dreads the feeling of disappointment.

Draco's mind spins because while he wants to ask the witch, he too dreads the feeling of disappointment. He mentally scolds himself, frustrated that his own self-doubt has caused him to end up exactly where he had previously started.

Draco believes that it had been his fault, that things had ended between them the first time. Now, he's worried that the witch won't be willing to give him another chance. And to make matters worse, he wouldn't blame her in the slightest if this was the case.

Draco hates the feeling that creeps up on him when he finally reaches a point of determination. Only a few days prior, he'd decided that he was finally ready, to at least try again. But now, as he approaches a crossroads of sorts, his will and conviction seem to have become frozen. It seems to be a never-ending cycle, he realizes. The moment he's finally willing to set his worries and fears aside, they come back, stronger than ever, battling his confidence until he is left with a feeling of coldness and emptiness once more.

The muggle expression of *cold feet* is exactly how Draco would describe the situation. He arrives at the precipice of happiness, determined to sail over the edge – but the moment he looks down, he worries that making the leap of faith isn't worth the risk.

His feelings for Granger have always been like this, hot and cold. Or rather, not his feelings for the witch, for those remain consistent over time, but his acceptance of said feelings.

His Mind Healer had explained that this reluctance to open himself up to the possibility of love is no fault of his own. He had also mentioned that it was up to Draco to make the changes required for this to be altered.

Draco sometimes wishes that he could brew a potion that would make it all easier. A potion that could convince him, even for a moment, that he is worthy of loving Hermione Granger, and perhaps even being loved in return.

He's upset with himself because he's certain that if he hadn't ended things so hastily, they could have stayed together. Perhaps they'd even be married now, maybe with a child on the way. This could have been his reality if he hadn't gone and backed out at the last minute, resigning himself to a life of pureblood expectations, rather than one of authentic happiness that he so desired.

Draco feels like a coward, truth be told, for running scared from something as sought after as love. It was cowardice that led to Draco taking the easy way out, rather than admitting to his feelings, leading to nothing but loneliness and longing. Now, instead of being happily married to his witch, he's back where he started, anxiously trying to open up to her once more.

Hermione is upset with herself as well. While she doesn't regret pursuing her second Mastery at Harvard, she does regret leaving. She regrets not fighting, for whatever it was that had begun to form between her and Draco. She hates that she'd stared directly at the happiness she'd sought for so long, and run in the opposite direction.

It's almost as if she'd become so accustomed to being let down, that she'd begun to find comfort in it, crave it even. There was a sense of ease and predictability in knowing that things will always be the same, even if they're never what you desire.

Hermione believes that it had been her fault, that things had ended between them the first time. Now, she's worried that the wizard won't be willing to give her another chance. And to make matters worse, she wouldn't blame him in the slightest if this was the case.

They'd gone their separate ways because she hadn't admitted to her feelings, hadn't put into words what had been transpiring between them. And now, years later, they're back where they started, and Hermione isn't sure how to proceed forward.

But she'll be damned if she doesn't at least try.

"What did you want to speak with me about?" she asks carefully, looking down at her feet.

For a moment, Draco considers telling the truth. He even opens his mouth to speak the words he'd rehearsed that morning. But the voice in the back of his head, the one that likes to remind him of his heinous past speaks up, whispering all sorts of phrases regarding his unworthiness.

The messages all boil down to the same thing.

He doesn't deserve her in the slightest.

So, once again, Draco opts for the easy route. "Oh you know, just looked like you needed saving from that conversation with Krum," he chuckles.

Hermione comes to a halt, staring at him incredulously. "I beg your pardon?" she fumes.

"Just like McClaggen, I thought you could use an out," he starts, fumbling his words.

"I most certainly did not need an out!" she seethes, growing more and more upset.

"Well, my apologies!" Draco replies. Secretly, the beginnings of an argument have calmed his nerves significantly – quarrelling with Granger is familiar territory, something he knows well. But instead of yelling back how he'd hoped she would, Hermione pivots and takes off at a brisk pace toward the castle.

As he tips his head back and stares at the stars above him, Draco realizes that this situation is far too familiar. So familiar in fact, that it feels like a slap across the face.

Because for the second time, Draco is left alone as he watches the witch he loves storm off into the night.



[art by the lovely aurithemoon](#)



art by [anxious-m3ss](#) on tumblr

The Yule Ball

Chapter Notes

As always, a huge thank you to likelyunfinished, whits_end, and callcalypso for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

Welcome to a chapter I have wanted to write since I started this fic! Ily all, thank you for reading my little story ♥

Potential trigger warning: very brief mention of a love potion being slipped into someone's tea. I wasn't sure if this was something that could potentially be triggering for someone!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Draco knows possibly everything there is to know about love potions. He knows that they were invented by Laverne de Montmorency in the 1800s. He knows that most brews include Ashwinder eggs, rose thorns, peppermint, pearl dust, and moonstone. He's read many published papers on the topic, including Zygmunt Budge's entire dissertation on the use of *genus Rosa* for the brew.

He knows that Amortentia is the most powerful love potion that has been brewed to date, recognizable by its mother-of-pearl sheen and spiralling steam. He knows that the smell of the potion varies from person to person and is dependent upon what each individual finds appealing.

But, with this endless amount of knowledge regarding the brew itself, truly nothing prepared Draco for the conversation he is currently having.

"Mister Selwyn, this is an extremely serious situation," he explains, his glare fixed on the fifth-year Slytherin sitting on the stool across from him. "Love potions are banned, and are grounds for expulsion, we take this sort of situation *very* seriously."

The boy begins to shift uncomfortably in his seat as if the severity of the situation is finally dawning on him.

"Your mother is Eleanor Selwyn, correct?" Draco asks, filling in all the mandatory paperwork. "I will have to send her an owl once I meet with Miss MacIntyre and Professor Longbottom – her family may wish to press charges."

The boy begins to retort, arguing that slipping a love potion into the Gryffindor's morning tea had all been in "good fun" and he *certainly* hadn't had any malicious intent.

Draco has to hold his tongue, already fuming. He's all too aware of just how easy love potions are to acquire nowadays, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes is one of many companies that will send their products disguised as perfumes and cough potions, allowing Hogwarts students to order the banned potion.

"Well, that's all well and great, Mister Selwyn, but I suppose we'll never know the truth, will we? Fortunately for Miss MacIntyre, her friends recognized the signs and took her to the Hospital Wing

immediately,” Draco drawls. “However, if this had not occurred, how am I to know that you wouldn’t have attempted something?” he inquires.

After a beat, he asks “Why did you do it? Tell me the truth, I’ll know if you’re lying.”

The boy remains silent, staring at his dragon-hide shoes. After a moment, he speaks. “Because she’ll never want to be with me,” he answers. “I tried asking her to come to Hogsmeade with me five times now, but she always says no.”

“And what makes you think that you’re the one who should make this decision for Miss MacIntyre?” Draco inquires. “If you admire her as much as you clearly do, shouldn’t you want her to have the free will to make such choices for herself?”

Callum’s face drops, clearly upset with himself. “Yes,” he replies simply.

“I will offer you some advice, Mister Selwyn, and please do listen carefully,” Draco begins, waiting for the boy to look in his direction.

“You cannot force people to love you.”

“Love is a fickle thing – it’s excruciating, it’s beautiful, it’s nonsensical. Sometimes you may feel as if your heart is bursting at the seams, overflowing with feelings of devotion and longing. But just because you feel this way about someone, does not guarantee they feel the same toward you.”

Draco waits for the boy to nod before continuing.

“I know it may hurt to watch Miss MacIntyre love others more than yourself. But, if you really care for the witch, her happiness is what should matter above all else. Because if you claim to love someone, yet simultaneously attempt to control and manipulate them – that’s not real love Mister Selwyn. Real love is wishing for their happiness, no matter if you’re a part of it. Real love is being content to sit on the sidelines and observe, so long as they are smiling.”

Callum takes in a deep breath before nodding, finally seeming to understand. “I’m very sorry Professor,” he whispers.

“Mister Selwyn, it is not I who requires an apology,” Professor Malfoy replies, patting the boy on the shoulder.

Hermione paces anxiously in front of the floo in the Three Broomsticks, awaiting the arrival of none other than Narcissa Malfoy. Draco had been the one who was meant to fetch her, but with the Love Potion incident that had occurred, Hermione had reluctantly agreed to assist.

It’s not that she’s frightened of the witch, not any longer at least. No, Hermione is simply hesitant to be alone with her once again. Hermione has known for quite some time that Narcissa Malfoy is far more conniving than everyone realizes. She can decipher very easily that the witch meticulously plans each and every word she speaks, lacing them with both pragmatic and semantic intentions. The witch doesn’t utter a single word without forethought – without analyzing the interlocutor to such an extent that she already knows how they will respond.

Narcissa Malfoy, in Hermione’s opinion, is extremely adept at reading people, at understanding who they are, their motives, and their intentions before they themselves have even come to terms

with these things.

And while Hermione greatly admires these traits, she also fears them.

As a general rule, Hermione does not enjoy being perceived to such an extent. She prefers to select and curate the aspects of herself that she wishes to reveal to someone. So when Narcissa Malfoy steps through the floo without a speck of dust on her pristine robes, Hermione braces for impact.

“Hermione, dear, so lovely to see you again,” the witch smiles, her expression genuine.

“And you Narcissa, I’m sorry that Draco couldn’t be here to greet you. He’s occupied with an, er, incident at the castle.”

“Oh that’s quite alright,” the witch smiles. “Nothing too serious I hope?” she inquires.

“Well, a Slytherin boy slipped a love potion into a witch’s tea, so it is rather serious,” Hermione clarifies. “But I have no doubt that Draco will have it well and under control,” she adds, shifting awkwardly under the witch’s gaze.

“A Slytherin boy you say?” asks Narcissa. “Is he from a family I would know, perhaps?”

Hermione grimaces before replying, “yes he’s a Selwyn.”

“Eleanor’s son no doubt,” Narcissa replies with pursed lips. “She will be mortified.”

Hermione can’t help but agree.

The conversation during the walk to the castle passes smoothly, the topics ranging from society events Narcissa has been planning, to Hermione’s own personal interests.

“Draco once mentioned that you practice yoga, is this still something you enjoy?” Narcissa asks casually.

Hermione has to stop herself from stumbling. Had Draco really told his mother about her practicing yoga?

Narcissa’s motivation to ask this question is, of course, quite multifaceted. On one hand, she is genuinely curious about the art of yoga, especially after her healer had advised her of the various benefits. However, this question also acts as a prompt of sorts, one that will hopefully remind Hermione of her time with her son.

“Yes, I still do, though not as frequently as I should like to,” she replies carefully, attempting to discern Narcissa’s purpose.

“Well, I would love to borrow any texts you may have on the topic, the Malfoy library is sorrily lacking anything on the subject,” the witch smiles.

“Oh, yes of course!” Hermione replies, finding herself eager to discuss this with the witch. “I’m quite interested in the connection between yoga and alchemy, it’s fascinating.”

Narcissa nods, “have you read Argo Pyrites’ newest publication regarding his research on curing lycanthropy through alchemy?”

Hermione's eyes go wide, eagerly turning to face the witch. "No, though I'm not sure why – I subscribe to the Journal of Alchemy," she begins.

"Ah, well, it hasn't been released as of yet, though I'd be happy to lend you my copy," Narcissa replies. "Argo is a dear friend of mine, we grew close during our N.E.W.T Alchemy class."

Hermione grins, already imagining how life-altering it would be for Remus if a cure for lycanthropy was found. However, she also takes a moment to scold herself for an assumption she'd subconsciously believed. Previously, she'd assumed that Narcissa Malfoy would have only completed the mandatory classes, and *surely* not any subjects as advanced as Alchemy.

But, Hermione realizes that this assumption was her close-mindedness striking once more. It wasn't fair of her to assume that being a pureblood socialite is synonymous with possessing a disinterest or ineptitude for academia.

"I would love to read it, if you don't mind," Hermione replies.

"Excellent, I will send you an owl with an invitation to tea," the witch smiles. "Oh, and before I forget," she begins as they approach the castle. "I host a New Year's Eve Gala every year, you are, of course, invited."

Hermione had still been attempting to come to terms with the fact that Narcissa Malfoy had invited her to tea at the manor, but an invitation to her famous Gala sends her into a spiral. However, she also doesn't have the heart to tell the witch that she is currently terribly upset with her son, and doesn't feel all that confident about spending any time in his family home.

But, Hermione is nothing if not a people pleaser, and there matters far more important than her love life that needs tending to at this moment in time. "That would be lovely, Narcissa, thank you," she smiles.

When they arrive in the Great Hall, Narcissa sets to work immediately. With a snap of her fingers, twelve house elves appear before them wearing small carpenters' uniforms. Narcissa hands them each a small piece of paper, no doubt with detailed instructions. The elves all begin working a split second later, summoning tools out of thin air.

"Er, is there anything I can do to help?" Hermione asks, amazed by the efficacy of the highly competent elves.

"Oh no darling, they have it under control. And fret not, they are paid exceptionally well," the witch smiles. "I am happy to stay and supervise if you'd like to use this time to get ready."

Hermione nods, though she's already dreading the whole ordeal.

"And which lucky wizard is escorting you this evening?" Narcissa asks casually, waving her wand with a flourish.

"Viktor Krum," she smiles.

"Ah yes, much like your last Yule Ball, yes?" Narcissa confirms.

“Indeed,” Hermione begins. She battles herself mentally, debating whether or not she should allude to what had transpired between her and Draco. She isn’t quite sure why she has the urge to share what had occurred with the witch at all, but for some reason, she feels as if Narcissa may be a silent supporter of her. “It was a last-minute decision actually, I approached him about it. I hadn’t been asked by anyone else and didn’t want to arrive alone,” she admits, her mouth pursed into a thin line.

“Well, he’s a very lucky wizard to have the honour of accompanying you Hermione,” Narcissa replies with a smile. As she watches the curly-haired witch exit the Great Hall, however, she grimaces.

She is going to need to have a *word* with her son.

As Hermione readies herself for the ball, she feels as if she’s been transported back to her 15-year-old self once more. She remembers quite well how both nervous and excited she’d been. She’d spent hours getting ready, taming her hair with all sorts of charms and potions, and twisting it into an updo she’d taught herself from a muggle magazine. She’d delicately applied makeup and dressed in her periwinkle dress before standing in front of the mirror and smiling.

Because for possibly the first time ever, Hermione had felt beautiful.

Then, of course, Ron had gone and ruined her makeup by making her cry. But she didn’t care, she’d had her moment, and that was more than she could ask for.

She had been feeling nostalgic when she went shopping for robes the week prior, Ginny having insisted on this gown in particular. Though her robes this time are much more mature, they remain the same periwinkle blue as before – her favourite colour.

Something about the shade brings out a warm glow in her skin, accentuating her freckles and eyes. Her gown sits off the shoulder with a floor-length skirt and matching cape of sorts. She’d fallen in love with it the moment she’d seen it on the rack.

Now, as she stands in front of her mirror, smoothing her skirt ever-so-slightly, she wonders how the evening will transpire. She knows that none of this event is about her in the slightest and that she is attending as a chaperone and nothing more, but she remains hopeful.

She wonders if maybe, just maybe, Draco will ask her for a dance. Even if it’s with platonic intentions, Hermione doesn’t think that she’ll mind. She feels silly for wanting such a thing, she is supposed to be upset with him after all. But, Hermione’s never been able to stay mad at the blond prat for long.

Though the exterior of the Lupin-Black cottage is an idyllic sight with a snow-covered roof and Christmas lights hung, the interior is in an absolute frenzy as all three inhabitants prepare for the ball. Sirius had insisted that Cassie get ready for the ball at home and the look of desperation on his face had been enough for her to comply with his wishes.

Her fathers are both looking quite dapper, Cassie thinks with a smile. Sirius is wearing traditional wizards' robes – black, of course. Remus has opted for a grey set, with slightly less flair than his partner.

As Cassie waltzes down the stairs, giving a little twirl once she arrives in the kitchen, her fathers break into applause. Sirius starts crying almost immediately, wiping tears from his eyes as he mumbles things such as “my little girl is all grown up,” in between sobs.

Cassie is in love with the gown she purchased. The dress is made of floor-length black satin fabric with silver constellations stitched into the hems. When she spins it sparkles ever-so-slightly, catching the light. There’s a slit over her left leg, allowing her just the right of movement she’d been hoping for.

After many tears, Sirius comes to terms with the fact that his daughter is no longer a ten-year-old girl, and switches gears. “Now who is this wizard that you’re attending the ball with?” he asks, cracking his knuckles in an act that Cassie can only assume is meant to be menacing.

“His name is Amari, dad, we’ve been over this,” she smiles.

“And he’s from Uagadou?” Remus asks.

“Yes, he’s very kind and asked me like a perfect gentleman,” she confirms.

“I don’t like him,” Sirius declares, crossing his arms.

“Dad, you haven’t even met him,” Cassie whines.

“I don’t need to, he’s a seventeen-year-old boy.”

“Pads,” Remus begins, attempting to calm Sirius before he takes off on a tangent.

“I’ll introduce you to him tonight,” she smiles. “It’s okay dad,” she adds, pulling Sirius into a hug.

After dealing with the Selwyns and Macintyres for the past few hours, the last thing Draco wants to do is attend a Ball. He’d been forced to attend far too many of these events in his youth, meaning that they’d quite lost their novelty by now.

But, he also knows that Granger will likely string him up by his toes if he doesn’t complete his assigned duties for the evening. So, he puts on his best set of robes, ruffles his hair, and takes off toward the Great Hall.

He spots his mother, no doubt casting the final charms for the evening and quickly makes his way over to her. “Mother,” he smiles, quite happy to see her. However, his smile disappears the moment he sees her expression – one of fury.

“Draco, darling,” she smiles, though Draco knows this is not a smile of joy or pride – it’s a smile he fears being on the receiving end of.

“Hello,” he replies carefully.

“Attending this evening alone are we?” she asks, her left eyebrow raised.

“Indeed.”

“Well, at least Ms. Granger won’t be attending alone,” she replies.

“Oh?” Draco asks. He had suspected that the witch would turn to Krum after he’d fumbled his own attempt – or rather *lack thereof*.

“Yes, it seems that no one had thought to ask her,” Narcissa seethes, leaning in toward her son. “But lucky for you, I have invited her to my New Years' Eve Gala.”

Draco reels back at this, “and why would you do that?”

“Because it’s my Gala, and I thought it prudent to invite her,” she retorts, her tone laced with venom.

“Very well,” he replies, lacking the energy to engage in a disagreement with his mother. He releases a breath and allows a look of disappointment to appear on his face, one he would hide from anyone other than his mother.

Narcissa, still in a fury, does what all good mothers do and pulls him into a hug regardless. She whispers, “you deserve to be happy, my stars.”

Draco has experienced déjà vu many times in his life. He hates the feeling, mostly due to the fact that he’d rather not have to relive any instances from the majority of his life. But this moment, in particular, he hardly minds at all. In fact, one might say he revels in this feeling of déjà vu. He can remember the moment from his fourth year as if it had occurred only yesterday, his mind playing it back with alarming accuracy and realism.

But watching Hermione descend the stairs in live and living colour is better than any memory Draco can possibly recall of the witch. He loves how effortlessly beautiful she is – how she seems to glow regardless of what she’s wearing, or how much effort she’s put into her appearance.

In fact, Draco can’t remember a single time when he’s looked at the witch and hasn’t had to manually regulate his breathing.

And the gown. *The gown* . It’s enough to set Draco on edge, his palms beginning to sweat as he watches her enter the space. Time seems to slow, everything around them ceasing to exist as he watches her float toward him.

“Malfoy,” she addresses him curtly, breaking his dream-like trance.

“Granger, you look lovely as always,” he smiles, bowing for dramatic effect.

“Thank you,” she nods, her lips pursed. “I trust you can supervise this area while I meet with the champions?” she asks.

“Aye aye, captain,” he salutes, bringing forth an old joke in an attempt to lighten the mood.

Hermione rolls her eyes in his direction, not wanting to give in to his feeble attempt to make her smile. But, as she walks away with her back turned to him, she smiles anyways.

All eight champions and their dates are waiting in the small corridor that runs parallel to the Great Hall. And as Hermione completes her headcount, she immediately thanks her lucky stars that they all arrived on time.

“Hello champions,” she smiles, glancing quickly at her goddaughter. Hermione had known that Cassie would look absolutely breathtaking in the gown they’d purchased, but seeing it on her now makes her want to cry.

Cassie is like a sister to her, but also a daughter in some ways. She’d watched the girl grow up, moving through all the stages of childhood and pre-adolescence – but seeing her like this, as a young woman, makes her yearn for the young girl she once was. Because while she wouldn’t change a single thing about her goddaughter, she does wish that the time of blissful childhood would have lasted a little longer for her.

It’s something that Hermione has noticed in all young witches, and even in herself – the desire to grow up far too quickly. Her heart aches for the third-years that fret about their weight and appearance, and the fifth-years that pretend they no longer care about their childish ambitions. She understands, she remembers the pressure that exists, forcing young girls to grow up far before they need to, and the ridicule they may feel if they refuse to comply.

It saddens her, to watch the young witches spend their entire childhood trying to grow up, because she knows perhaps better than anyone, that when you do grow up, you’ll wish you hadn’t at all.

She chooses to find solace in the fact that Cassie had had a relatively normal childhood, one filled with laughter, crushes, heartbreak and naive optimism – a childhood that Hermione herself wishes she could have lived.

“Now, you will each walk in, one behind the other into the Great Hall,” she begins. “Each pair will then spread out across the dance floor in a circular formation and start off the evening with the french waltz.”

Some of the students begin to nod, while others look genuinely fearful at the prospect of being the centre of attention. “Then, others will begin to join, likely after the first minute or two,” she smiles, hoping that this is enough reassurance to calm the nerves of the students.

“You all look lovely, by the way,” she adds.

“You too, Professor Granger!” whistles a seventh-year Ravenclaw boy. She glances to his left, realizing that he’s attending with Mei.

“Yes, thank you, Mister Davies,” she laughs.

A house-elf appears, giving her a thumbs up to signal that they are ready for the champions. “Follow me,” she grins, leading the procession into the Hall.

Her breath catches the moment she enters the space, shocked at the realism Narcissa had managed to bring forth. The Great Hall now appears to be an actual forest clearing, any trace of the usual room seemingly erased from existence.

The floating lights glisten overhead, real fairies flying happily through the trees. The lamp posts lining the walkway flicker, illuminating the champions in a warm glow. The trees are perfectly placed around the edges, creating a delightful canopy of foliage above them.

The charmed ceiling, of course, reflects the night sky. Hermione smiles to herself when she locates the constellation she’d been looking for.

She quickly tucks herself off to the side, amongst a crowd of students, watching the champions enter with a grin.

The first to enter is Charles Monet of Beauxbatons, accompanied by a sixth-year Slytherin girl whose expression suggests this is quite possibly the best moment of her life to date.

Behind them is Mukisa Akumu of Uagadou, a witch from Mahoutokoro on his arm. He grins widely, but the girl next to him appears quite perturbed by the crowd.

Next, is Mei Sakurai of Mahoutokoro, Ethan Davies proudly escorting her toward the dancefloor.

Luiz Fernanda of Castelobrujo follows closely behind, a seventh-year Gryffindor staring at him with an expression of admiration.

Aleksei Petrov of Koldovstoretz enters next, with a witch from his own school on his arm. Hermione can't help but wonder if they were an item before their arrival.

Caitlyn Jones of Ilvermorny enters, her face blank. She is being escorted by a boy from Durmstrang but doesn't appear to be too thrilled about it.

Nikolai Yankova of Durmstrang enters second to last, a Beauxbatons witch gripping his arm quite fiercely.

Finally, Cassie emerges onto the dance floor, Amari of Uagadou proudly showcasing the witch to all those present. Hermione quickly locates Remus and Sirius amongst the crowd, laughing to herself as she notices an expression of absolute fury on Sirius's face.

With all the champions in their place around the dancefloor in a circular formation, the conductor raises his arms into the starting position, the musicians readying themselves.

As the music commences, the champions take off, each pair completing the steps of the waltz somehow differently from the group next to them. Hermione smiles to herself, remembering just how awful Harry had been at the dancing aspect of the whole celebration. She, of course, had practiced meticulously for the two weeks leading up to the ball and had moved through the dance with ease.

Suddenly, she feels a hand grab her elbow, causing her to whip around in worry. Her face softens when it lands on the Bulgarian wizard, realizing just how impeccable his timing had been. "Hermione," he bows. "Shall we?" He extends his arm to her.

"Of course," Hermione smiles.

The pair enter the dancefloor, the first chaperones to do so. Hermione can feel Viktor's eyes on her, though she can't help but note how this realization does nothing to her. It doesn't make her skin tingle, or her heart flutter – it remains a simple observation and nothing else.

But, she allows herself to be whisked around the dancefloor, tipping her head back in laughter as Viktor spins her, catching her lightly.

Tucked behind multiple rows of students, all anxiously trying to work up the courage to enter the dancefloor, Draco remains silent and stoic. His eyes are glued on Hermione, tracking her every

movement. He grimaces slightly when Krum spins her toward him and frowns when she offers the Bulgarian a smile.

He's upset with himself, for putting himself in this situation once more – on the outside looking in. He wishes it were him, guiding her through the waltz, delicately holding her back with his palm, and catching her after a spin. But, he reminds himself of the advice he had offered only hours ago: real love is wishing for their happiness, no matter if you're a part of it. Real love is being content to sit on the sidelines and observe, so long as they are smiling.

So that's what Draco does, at least for the time being.

As the night progresses, Draco has the exact amount of fun he'd expected to have – which is absolutely none at all. While he enjoys teaching, he much prefers the spreading knowledge aspect of it over the supervising petulant children portion of the job.

He reprimands a seventh-year Gryffindor for attempting to spike the punch, quickly siphoning the firewhiskey out of the bowl. Next, he finds a Beauxbatons witch and Uagadou wizard tangled together in a broom closet, leading to him fetching both of their accompanying professors.

Then, a short ten minutes later, he finds three fourth-year Slytherin witches attempting to sneak into the ball. "Ah, Miss Avery, Rhett, and MacMillan, so good to see you all," he drawls, quite enjoying the fear on their faces as they realize they've been caught.

"Hello, Professor Malfoy," Miss Avery replies sheepishly.

"We were just going for a walk through the corridors before winding down for bed," Miss Rhett adds.

"Ah yes, in gowns no less," he replies with a raised brow. "You three should know better than to try and lie to me," he adds, his arms crossed.

"But--"

"Off to bed," he instructs curtly with a shooing motion. The three witches scamper off in a fit of giggles.

Exhaling, he turns toward the Great Hall once more, debating whether or not he can stomach witnessing Granger on Krum's arm quite yet. He'd been fuming by the time he'd asked Longbottom to trade supervision shifts with him, opting to stay in the Entry Hall for the rest of the evening.

It's a complicated feeling because while it's hard to see her with another wizard, it's also entirely his fault. Sometimes he wishes he had an ounce more of that Gryffindor bravery all the lions seem to exude, and slightly less of the Slytherin self-preservation he possesses in multitudes.

Taking a deep breath, he re-enters the Great Hall, his eyes finding her almost immediately. He wonders if he should perhaps ask her for a dance, even just as a colleague. But, he also doesn't want to overstep, he knows that the witch is upset with him – and rightfully so, he'd gone and selfishly pulled her away from the wizard she wanted to be speaking with.

He stands off to the side, observing, quite enjoying watching her speak animatedly with Professor Sakurai. A smile creeps its way onto his face as she emits a full belly laugh, gripping her waist as she wipes a tear from her eye.

Suddenly, he hears a noise that he'd been hoping to avoid altogether that evening.

"Professor Malfoy!" Jocelyne squeals. Draco's eyes grow wide as he takes in her gown. He knows that fashions are likely to vary across the pond, but he doubts that this ensemble could be considered school-appropriate in any country.

She looks lovely, of course, she is an undeniably beautiful witch. But, something about the way the witch chooses to exude her beauty sets Draco on edge. He knows that it's not up to him, how witches choose to express themselves, it's more of a personal preference than anything else.

Though Draco also knows that this view is likely stemming from the fact that he's only ever really had eyes for one witch.

He'd tried, of course – to find someone else.

He had attempted to maintain the charade of his betrothal to Astoria Greengrass, which had gone as well as expected. After that, his mother had sent him on no less than thirty dates with eligible witches. He'd been impressed when he'd seen his itinerary – *yes itinerary* . He'd assumed that the list would be filled with various pureblood witches, but, his mother had impressed him. There had been ten half-bloods on the list, and one muggleborn.

Twenty-five of the dates were an absolute waste of time in Draco's opinion. The witches had been vapid and self-absorbed, clearly only able to speak about society gossip and perfectly curated conversation topics. They would deliver well-practiced compliments, and daintily make contact with him, but it all made Draco feel queasy.

Five witches had been perfectly fine. In another life, perhaps Draco may have actually enjoyed their presence. These five clearly had brains and were able to maintain a somewhat stimulating conversation. They would laugh, genuinely, and ask meaningful questions. And perhaps most importantly, they were happy to visit muggle establishments for dinner – a sort of test that Draco enjoyed putting them through.

One girl, Gwen, a Dutch half-blood witch, had been his top contender. She was evidently well-educated and extremely passionate about herbology. She had completed a mastery in the subject and was in the midst of writing a book on magical plants native to the Baltics.

Draco had found himself genuinely enjoying the witch's presence, even smiling and laughing with her. However, they only dated for approximately two months before things went awry.

It had been a bad idea, in hindsight, to introduce her to his friends. They'd been cordial of course, exchanging niceties with one another, and discussing common interests and current events. But the minute Gwen had bid them farewell and stepped through the floo, the entire group of Slytherins had turned to him with knowing looks.

March 15th, 2003, Parkinson Manor

"What?" he spits.

“Oh nothing Draco,” Pansy answers lazily, draining the last sip of her gin martini.

“Then why are you all looking at me like I’m an injured owl?” he retorts, glaring at Theo who is in the midst of a snicker.

“Well mate, you’ve done it!” Theo laughs.

“Done what?” Draco yells, exasperated.

“You went and found the most Granger-esque witch you could find,” Theo explains with a smirk.

“I did not! Gwen is nothing like Hermi-” he begins, cutting himself short. Maybe Theo has a point, he realizes.

“Now Draco, we all have a type, but *that*, that was next-level,” smiles Blaise, sipping on his glass of whiskey.

Draco remains silent, quickly realizing that Gwen is indeed nothing more than a sorry attempt at replacing Granger. She has curly honey-brown hair, and light freckles splattered across her cheeks. She has a swotty tone and a self-assured posture. She is bookish, and a know-it-all. Hell, she’s even the exact same height as Hermione.

He takes a seat and drops his head into his hands, beginning to massage his temples.

Theo meanders toward him and gives him a reassuring pat on the back, “It’s okay mate, we’re proud of you for getting back out there.”

“Seriously though, it’s like you had Granger cloned,” laughs Pansy.

Draco decides then and there that he’s quite done with dating.

December 15th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

The witch begins to ramble, asking him about how his evening has been thus far and all sorts of ridiculous questions. Draco chooses to employ his favourite tactic for these types of situations: a well-mannered smile partnered with a nod.

As he diligently nods his head every few moments, he keeps his eyes locked on Granger. He watches as Krum bows his head and places a kiss on her hand. He watches as the wizard escorts her onto the dancefloor once more, his hand placed on her lower back. He grimaces as the wizard leans in to whisper something to the witch – his witch.

“Fancy a dance, Ms. Williams?” he asks suddenly, turning to aim a look of genuine interest in the direction of the American witch.

“I would love to!” she squeals, accepting his outstretched arm.

The pair makes their way toward the dancefloor, but Draco doesn’t spare the witch even the slightest of glances. No, his sights are set elsewhere.

He strategically positions them close to Granger and Krum, but not close enough that it seems intentional. As the orchestra strikes, he flashes his best grin in Jocelyne’s direction, whisking her

through the Viennese waltz – a dance he’s been familiar with since his childhood.

The music flows, the various bodies in the forest clearing moving in time with the tempo. But Draco’s mind isn’t focused on his movements, nor the music for that matter. He allows his subconscious to take over, propelling him through the familiar steps.

As his body moves, he attempts to find the confidence to ask Granger for a dance. He vows to ask the moment the song comes to a close, already envisioning himself closing the space between them.

With a plan in place, he focuses his eyes back on the witch he is currently guiding. She smiles back, clearly thrilled. Draco feels slightly guilty, for using Jocelyne as a pawn in this little game, but based on Granger’s evident disdain for the witch, he convinces himself it’s excusable, merely a means to an end.

As the tune starts to slow, Draco’s heart begins to beat quicker, his hands becoming clammy in anticipation. Jocelyne leans in toward him, whispering in his ear with a smile.

But as she whispers sweet nothings, all Draco can see is the horrified expression of the witch who had chosen to approach him at that very moment. They make eye contact for a moment, a feeling of remorse washing over Draco like a cold seaspray. He opens his mouth to say something – say anything.

The music comes to a stop, the crowd bursts into applause, and Hermione turns and flees.

Draco breaks away from the American witch at once, quickly following Hermione out of the Great Hall. He passes groups of students discussing the evening in hushed whispers and excited ramblings, he notices two witches mid-snog, and a fifth-year that’s evidently drunk, but he pays them no mind. He knows another Professor will be along shortly, he has far more important matters to deal with at the moment.

“Oh Draco, are you alright?” he hears suddenly, the dreamy voice a stark contrast to the loudness of his mind.

“Oh, hi Luna, I can’t talk right now,” he explains, keeping on his path toward the looming doors. He pushes them open quite aggressively, the frigid December air quickly making itself known.

He should cast a warming charm, but the adrenaline coursing through his veins works just the same. He’s determined this time, to make things right.

He glances around hopelessly, attempting to discern where the witch had headed. Casting a quick Lumos, he finds her footsteps in the snow, and based on the general direction, Draco already knows where the witch had ventured.

Hermione sits on the stones by the forest, her gown likely ruined by the snow. Why is it that she always ends these nights crying? Why can’t she just have a nice, pleasant Yule Ball without crying over a stupid wizard? She feels ridiculous, for being as upset as she is.

She hates when her emotions take over like this, overriding all semblance of logic and critical thinking. She hates when she can’t make sense of herself, or the way she’s feeling.

Then again, Draco has always had that effect on her. Hermione hadn’t known that she could feel her emotions so strongly until he’d waltzed into her life. She hadn’t known she had such a capacity

to love so completely and immensely that she worries it will swallow her whole. She hadn't known that her heart could physically ache until he'd been the cause of it.

And now here she is, years later, with the same unrelenting ache beating in her chest.

"Granger?" she hears suddenly, her head snapping up, wand pointed in the direction of the voice. She really doesn't want to see anyone right now.

But, when she sees who had spoken her name, she realizes that Draco is somehow both the last and only person she wants to see in her current state. She's upset with him, so inexplicably upset, but she also desires his comfort more than anything else.

"Hi," she mumbles sheepishly.

"May I join you?" he asks carefully, glancing at the vacant space next to her, his usual spot.

She only nods in response.

After casting a warming charm over the witch and clearing the rocks of any snow, he perches himself next to her.

"I'm sorry," he begins, his voice almost a whisper.

She glances up at him with a confused expression, as if the words he had uttered didn't quite make sense to her.

"For being a prat, as per usual," he continues, attempting to lighten the situation while still remaining serious.

"You're not a prat, Draco," she replies, surprising herself with the use of his given name.

"I am, you've said it yourself," he smiles. "But I'm also sorry for selfishly taking you away from your conversation with Krum the other day, that was presumptuous of me."

She turns to face him completely, possibly even more confused than she had been.

"I understand now that you don't need to be saved from him at all, it seems as if you do quite enjoy his company," he continues, rambling.

Hermione then realizes that Draco hasn't a single clue about what's been going on. She'd been in this game entirely by herself. She had thought him the opposing team, the mastermind behind the other side of the board when in reality, it had been her own fears that she was battling the entire time. She'd viewed each roll of the dice as a challenge when they'd been on the same team all along.

"Draco, *Draco*," she smiles, interrupting the slew of words currently exiting his mouth. He falls silent, glancing at her with his silver eyes, shimmering with a glint of hopefulness.

"I don't want to be with Viktor," she says simply. She isn't quite sure if she'd ready to admit to the second half of that statement just yet.

"Oh," Draco replies, staring down at his feet.

“Are you with Jocelyne?” she asks.

His head snaps up. “No, absolutely not.”

She laughs a full, unrestrained and genuine laugh. And Draco smiles, attempting to bottle this memory and store it in the back of his mind for safekeeping, wanting nothing more than to play the sound over and over again until he grows delirious.

“Well, good to know,” she smiles.

The euphoria that flows between the pair, the pulsating energy that seems to follow them wherever they go, grows and builds until it reaches its crescendo.

Emboldened, Draco stands, straightening his robes. He bows deeply, almost comically so. As his head is lowered, he peers up at her with a grin and extends his arm toward her.

“May I have a dance?” he asks.

Without a word, she places her hand in his. She laughs as she attempts a curtsy, and allows herself to stumble into the wizard as he pulls her close. “We have no music,” she whispers.

Draco waves his pointer finger with a grin, holding it up as he waits. Hermione stares at him with an awe-like expression, basking in the feeling that she can only describe as bliss.

She feels giddy because it feels *right*, to be held by him, to stare up at him with a smile, scents of parchment, grass, and peppermint enveloping her, a tether to the moment she’s experiencing.

An object whizzes toward them, and Draco catches it with the practiced hand of a seeker.

His walkman.

Her walkman.

She smiles as he places it on the rock next to them, locating his song of choice, and pressing play. The familiar tune begins to bleed into the air around them. It’s one of Hermione’s favourites, one she’s always associated with the wizard before her.

Though it isn’t a song intended for dancing, Draco doesn’t seem to be bothered by this in the slightest. He pulls her flush against his body and begins to sway, a grin spread across his face.

As the snowflakes float through the air, landing delicately in Hermione’s curls and on the tip of Draco’s nose, the pair remain silent both fully immersed in the trance that only they are a part of.

As the song continues to build in intensity, he spins her wildly, allowing her to evade his grasp almost entirely before reeling her back in again. She spins in a complete circle, crashing into him as he wraps his arm around her, pulling her closer.

They continue to sway, her back to him as he rests his chin on top of her curls.

Draco doesn’t fully understand the muggle idea of heaven, but if this moment, this song, and this witch are what awaits him at the end of this life — he thinks that perhaps the notion of death doesn’t seem so frightening any longer.

Chapter End Notes

you may have guessed, but the song they were dancing to is Iris by the Goo Goo Dolls :)

P.s. don't worry! Wolfstar & Cassie Yule ball content will be in chapter 20, this chapter was just getting to be too long!

Merry Christmas, Granger

Chapter Notes

Thank you to each and every one of you that's following along and leaving kudos and comments, they make me sob ily all

Also, I finally mapped out the entire story and updated the total chapters!

Beta love ♡ to whits_end and callcalypso + a huge thank you to likelyunfinished for reading this chapter & providing feedback !!

Follow me on TikTok and IG @embersofapril for updates and announcements ♡

TW: mention of potential attempted SA - it is not detailed, just briefly mentioned.

When Cassie notices the sun start to peek through her window the morning after the Yule Ball, she sits up in confusion. Sun? In the Slytherin dormitories? Cassie rubs her eyes, attempting to pry them fully open so that she might inspect the situation more closely. No, definitely not the Slytherin dormitories, and not her bedroom at home either.

The bed is exceptionally comfortable, the fresh white duvet practically begging for her to remain wrapped in its warmth. She lays back against the pillow with a sigh, closing her eyes as she tries to muster the courage to get up, and perhaps bother Professor Malfoy for a pepper-up potion.

She slowly starts to drift off to sleep once more, her mind slipping into that blissful place just before unconsciousness when she feels something shift in the bed next to her. Her heartbeat quickens as she slowly turns her body toward the source of movement.

There's a lump beneath the duvet to her left. She pokes the lump with a hesitant finger, ready to flee at a moment's notice, but there's no reaction at all. So, she takes in a deep breath and tears back the covers revealing none other than Caitlyn Jones.

"Jesus fuckin christ," the girl murmurs, attempting to shield her eyes from the light. "Leave me alone, Ashley," she groans, pulling the covers toward her once more.

"Caitlyn," Cassie says quickly, hoping her British accent is enough to alert the girl that she is in fact not in her Ilvermorny dormitory.

The girl bolts into an upright position, looking around with a bewildered expression. "Cassie?" she asks. "Where the fuck are we?"

"I'm, er, not sure," Cassie begins to answer. "But I have an idea." She begins to focus all her mental capacity on how nice it would be to have a hot cup of coffee right now, staring at the space on the bed in front of her.

Sure enough, a tray appears with two mugs, a pot of coffee, milk and sugar. “The Room of Requirement,” Cassie laughs, eagerly serving herself some coffee.

“But...” Caitlyn trails off, looking around the room. “It looks so ... different?”

“Yeah, it can completely transform itself into whatever you need,” Cassie smiles, looking around the room.

“Where did these pyjamas come from?” Caitlyn asks.

“I’m suspecting that they’re our gowns, transfigured.”

“Checks out,” Caitlyn nods. She serves herself some coffee in silence, shifting uncomfortably. “Do you, er, remember what happened?” she asks finally.

“Bits and pieces,” Cassie admits. In fact, Cassie remembers all of it quite well but hopes that this response will help ease Caitlyn’s nerves.

December 15th, 2006, The Great Hall, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

Cassie isn’t quite sure how she ended up with her wand pointed at the face of a cowering wizard, she just knows that it had been necessary.

She casts a quick *Petrificus Totalus* with a smirk and walks away, leaving the boy tucked away in the bushes. Serves him right, for trying to stun her and drag him in with her. Maybe her dad is right about this whole teenage boy thing, she thinks.

The night up until this point had passed in a blur, so as she makes her way back to the Great Hall, she attempts to collect her thoughts. She notes that Occlumency is significantly harder to use when one has consumed half a bottle of firewhiskey.

She’d entered the Great Hall with Amari and the other champions and taken part in the first dance. That, she remembers quite clearly. She’d brought Amari over toward her fathers next, introducing him with a hopeful smile. Truthfully, she doubted that she and Amari would see much of one another past this evening, but she also knew that evening would go a whole lot smoother if she just got this over with.

“Sirius Black, a pleasure to meet you,” Sirius grinned, gripping Amari’s hand much tighter than necessary. “I trust your intentions with my dear Cassandra are honourable?” he asked, putting on his best pureblood, aristocratic tone.

“Yes sir,” Amari nodded.

“Well I should hope so, I really don’t mind going *back* to prison, should something occur,” Sirius replied, his face stoic.

Amari’s eyes grew wide as he nodded once more.

“Hello Amari, it’s nice to finally meet you,” Remus smiled, extending his hand toward the boy. Amari accepted with a wince, no doubt expecting another death grip of a handshake. He visibly relaxed when Remus applied an average amount of force, refusing to play into the theatrics.

“Well you two run along, don’t let these two old dogs keep you,” Remus smiled, patting Amari on the back.

“Thank you, sir. Have a good evening, sir,” Amari replied, his voice shaking ever-so-slightly.

As the pair walked away, Cassie smiled. “Sorry about them, they can be a lot.”

“Er, yeah, that’s okay,” the boy replied, clearly quite shaken. “Has your dad really been to Azkaban?”

“Yeah, and he was the first in history to ever escape,” Cassie laughed, momentarily forgetting that most people find this fact terrifying when they don’t know the whole story.

“I’ll go get us drinks?” she asked, noticing a group of fellow Uagadou students nearby. Amari nodded, making a beeline in their direction.

After she’d snuck through a passageway with four other seventh-year Slytherins, one of whom nicked five bottles of Ogden’s finest, the evening passed in a firewhiskey-induced blur.

Somehow, she’d ended up outside, the awful boy from Koldovstoretz attempting to take advantage of her drunkenness. “What an arse,” she laughs to herself. Only a man would be so confident in his abilities to think he could overpower a witch that had been chosen as a champion for the tournament when he himself had not been.

She stumbles through the grounds, intent on locating the Hufflepuff that is more than likely hidden in the abandoned greenhouse. As she approaches the greenhouses, she hears a quiet voice speak her name.

She turns quickly toward the voice, far more alert now than she had been when she first stepped out into the cold. There, she finds Caitlyn leaning against the panes of glass. Her gown is soaked, but she appears not to mind as she continues to slowly smoke the joint in her hand.

“You okay?” Cassie asks.

“Oh yeah, just wanted to get away from the prat I agreed to attend with, for whatever reason,” Caitlyn laughs.

Cassie nods, casting a quick barrier on the snow next to the witch and taking a seat. “Wizards are a waste of time,” she sighs, tipping her head back.

“Yeah, you’re telling me,” Caitlyn laughs, offering the joint to the witch. “This is good stuff,” she adds.

“Yeah, the Hufflepuffs know what they’re doing,” Cassie smiles. “Is pot popular in America?” she asks, feeling slightly silly for how little she actually knows about the country across the ocean.

“I suppose, definitely easier to find when I’m home though,” she replies, her eyes glancing toward the sky.

“Are you... not American?” Cassie asks, suddenly confused.

“Canadian,” Caitlyn replies simply.

“I’ve always wanted to visit Canada,” Cassie admits. “My dads too.”

“Really?” Caitlyn asks with a tone of surprise.

“Yes *really*, it’s beautiful.”

The two witches sit in the cold for the better part of two hours, sharing what’s left of Cassie’s bottle of Ogden’s. They begin to enter that headspace, where life seems to pass in small moments, broken up and fragmented like puzzle pieces, time skipping like stones on the Black Lake.

They laugh and smile, the stress of the tournament and life as teenage witches ceasing to exist, at least for the time being. They discuss their hopes and dreams, and the lives that they envision for themselves after their time as a student has come to a close.

“I think I would like to get a Mastery in Magizoology,” Caitlyn admits. “But my dad wants me to go into politics.”

“At least you know what you want to do, I haven’t a clue,” Cassie sighs. “I feel like working in politics would be hell.”

“That’s an understatement, I don’t know why my dad thinks that I would want to follow his path after witnessing how miserable he’s been,” Caitlyn laughs, but Cassie recognizes this laugh as one that is used as a protective barrier, a shield from the real emotion behind the phrase.

“We could marry rich pureblood wizards, be housewives,” Cassie laughs.

“I think I’d go insane,” Caitlyn giggles. “I don’t think I could ever marry a wizard.”

Cassie nods, understanding the words left unspoken. Silence hangs in the air between the pair, both of their hearts beginning to beat quicker than they had only a moment prior.

“Shall we go inside?” Cassie asks, determined to fill the awkward silence.

“To the ball?”

“Gods no, follow me,” Cassie grins, leading the Canadian witch to one of the many secret passageways with a destination already in mind.

After arriving at the Room of Requirement, the pair immediately transfigure their gowns into pyjamas. They crawl into the bed and giggle well into the night, spending an evening as two young witches should: without a care in the world.

December 16th, 2006, The Room of Requirement

Caitlyn stills suddenly, her hand freezing midair. “Do you have the time?” she asks suddenly.

Cassie wordlessly casts the *tempus* spell, the number 8:47 appearing before her.

“Shit, shit, shit,” Caitlyn exclaims, clambering out of the bed. “Portkey leaves at 9:00, I have to go.” She transfigures her pyjamas into denims and a sweater before placing a brief kiss on Cassie’s cheek and disappearing from sight.

Cassie releases the breath she hadn't been consciously aware of holding, wondering what on earth she'd gotten herself into.

She's always known that she is equally attracted to both witches and wizards, but had never actually, well, allowed herself to be with a witch before.

Obviously given the fact that she was raised by two wizards, the concept of queerness was far from foreign to the witch. But as she continued to grow, she started to realize that the feelings all her friends were having toward the boys, she was having toward girls as well. The girl that sat three seats behind her in charms class would cause her heart to quicken, and her hands to shake in the same way as when a boy would catch her eye in the Great Hall.

At first, she figured that this was normal, perfectly acceptable, and simply how friendships between witches must be. After all, she was interested in wizards, so she couldn't be gay. For some reason, Cassie never felt like she could discuss such things with her fathers. She knew that they would more than likely be accepting, and encouraging even, but something always stopped her from opening her mouth and speaking the words she so badly wanted to express.

Frankly, Cassie didn't quite understand what she was feeling in the first place. It was all very confusing until finally, she'd found the courage to talk to someone about it.

"Mione? Can I ask you a question?" she asked.

"Of course Cass," Hermione smiled.

"And don't tell my fathers," Cassie added, eyebrow raised. Hermione nodded, growing slightly distressed by this addition.

"Er, have you ever felt er – attracted to a witch?" Cassie asked carefully, avoiding her godmother's gaze.

Hermione remained silent for a moment, and Cassie began to worry that she shouldn't have ever asked. But before her mind had a chance to spiral, Hermione answered.

"Yes," she replied simply.

"Oh!" Cassie exclaimed, looking up with an optimistic smile. "And is that er, normal?"

"Depends on what your definition of normal is," Hermione replied.

"But you like wizards too, right?" Cassie confirmed.

Hermione nodded, "I'm attracted to people based on who they are, not their bodily anatomy."

Ever since, Cassie had stopped fretting about her confusing feelings. But she hadn't necessarily *accepted* them – nor done anything about them.

Not until that prior evening, it seems.

She'd never admitted to liking witches to anyone other than Hermione, let alone kissed one.

Then Caitlyn Jones had come along and changed both of those things.

But as Cassie sits alone in the Room of Requirement, she smiles to herself, quite pleased with the outcome of her Yule Ball.

After ushering the last of the students to the Hogwarts Express, Hermione lowers herself onto the bench at the Hogsmeade Station and releases a long, exhausted sigh. She'd gotten next to no sleep the night prior, the events that had transpired keeping her wide awake. But she was hardly upset about that fact – she hadn't been able to wipe the grin off of her face all evening.

She was overjoyed at the fact that she and Draco had finally come to some kind of unspoken understanding. For the past few weeks, despite the many conversations they'd had with one another, neither of them had made the effort to put into words how they were feeling. Then again, Draco has never excelled in this area – expressing his feelings, that is.

And for some reason, Hermione hadn't been able to parse together a phrase that accurately encapsulated what she was feeling. To be fair, she's not entirely sure *what* she feels for Draco. She'd loved him once, and she has a sneaking suspicion that this feeling had never really gone away at all. Her feelings for Draco had been tucked away in the back of her mind, his leather-bound book tightly shut, hidden amongst the shelves.

She'd done her best to forget and ignore the dull ache that she'd been feeling ever since her departure from Oxford. Draco's arrival at Hogwarts, however, had made it quite difficult to remain impassive. The resurfacing of her feelings has been inevitable if she's being honest with herself.

She'd been heartbroken when she saw him dancing with Jocelyne, his lips twisted into a smile. At that moment, Hermione had decided for certain that he felt nothing toward her. After all, he'd never truly admitted to having any feelings for her in the first place, all those years ago.

She'd thought for a moment that perhaps their entire relationship – if it could even be considered as such – had all been a ruse.

But when Draco had come running out into the snow after her, her heart had skipped a beat. Even then, she tried to not get her hopes up, reminding herself that he could have followed her for reasons unknown. But the moment she realized that he'd misinterpreted the entire situation, she came to terms with the fact that it had been her fault all along for overcomplicating already convoluted circumstances.

When he asked her to dance, bowing deeply with a grin, she experienced the most peculiar sensation. It felt a lot like what she imagines experiencing Draco's *Felix Memorias* potion would be like. All her memories of him, each kiss, and brush of a hand, began replaying in her mind like a short film, reminding her of every moment that had led them to this one.

As they spun about, the stars above them their only witness, she'd felt at home – perhaps more at home than she had in years. The walkman, however, had been the true reward. It warmed her heart to know he'd kept it all these years.

The way he'd expertly navigated the machine.

The way he'd quickly located the song he'd been looking for.

Hermione couldn't stifle the smile and feelings that accosted her as she took in these details and understood what they meant. That he'd used the walkman many times over the years, more than

likely listening to the same ten songs over and over.

So, as she enters the Three Broomsticks and floo's to Muggle London, she knows exactly what to buy Draco for Christmas.

After walking Hermione back to her living quarters the evening prior, Draco hadn't been able to wipe the grin off of his face. The evening had been perfect, in his opinion. Well, the end of the evening had been – the rest he could do without.

She'd called him Draco, *twice*. He's unsure whether this was intentional, or simply a slip of the tongue, but he can't find it within himself to care in the slightest. He'd missed the sound of his given name on her lips – the way her mouth turns upward into a smile as she pronounces the last syllable.

He'd been wary until that very moment, wondering whether or not he should ask her to dance. It felt ridiculous to do so outside after all. But the minute she spoke his name, all his reluctance and overthinking finally receded, his mind no longer plagued with reminders of his unworthiness. It was as if his feelings of hopefulness were suddenly empowered to fight back, something as simple as his name enough to propel him forward, tossing self-preservation into the abyss.

Now, as he lies awake in bed, staring up at the ceiling above him, he swears his heart feels lighter. He'd been dreading staying at the castle over the holidays, but upon learning that Hermione would be staying as well, this dread had quickly become excitement.

As he prepares himself for his day, he finds a small smile tugging at his lips, because for the first time in many years, Draco feels as if things may be making a turn for the better.

The castle is shockingly empty over the holidays. All of the visiting schools had returned home via their chosen modes of transportation, many opting for portkeys. All but three Hogwarts students returned home via the Hogwarts Express, eagerly anticipating the Christmas Holidays spent with their friends and family.

However, instead of relaxing as she knows she should, Hermione opts to use this time to get ahead on her lesson plans.

She situates herself in her office with a large cup of tea and a cinnamon scone. She lights the fireplace with the flick of her wand, and settles in, ready for a good couple of hours of planning.

She finds it peaceful to inspect the learning objectives and fit them together like puzzle pieces, creating lessons, units, and assessments.

She begins by mapping out her schedule for the second term, casting it in the air in front of her for future reference. Then, she starts on her lists for the various charms that are required for each year, estimating how many classes it will take to cover each specific charm. From there, she maps them out in a logical sequence, assuring that the students will have all the prior knowledge required for each spell.

She's in the midst of planning the midterm assessment for her sixth-year students when she hears a knock at the door. "Come in!" she yells, her eyes remaining glued on the piece of parchment on her desk.

Her head snaps up the minute the door opens, the unmistakable scent of parchment and peppermint reaching her nose. "Hello," she smiles.

Draco remains silent at first, taking in the sight before him. Granger's desk is a mess, littered with various textbooks and scrap pieces of parchment. Her weekly planner is being levitated in front of her, the cup of coffee on her desk long gone cold.

"Granger, tell me you aren't marking right now," he drawls.

"No, I'm lesson planning," she retorts.

"It's the holidays, Granger," he replies, a small smirk making its way onto his face.

"Yes, well, it's always good to be prepared," she replies simply, turning back to her parchment.

Draco meanders his way into her office, coming to a halt behind her chair. He peeks over her shoulder, noticing her quill writing of its own accord.

"Swbat?" he asks, confused.

"Yes Malfoy, it stands for '*students will be able to* .' It's the preface for the learning objectives," she replies, aghast. "Are you not using SWBATs?" she asks suddenly, turning to face him.

"I wasn't aware that this was something that I was required to be using," he replies, unbothered.

"Well you really should, it's always good to outline the educational objectives that you're meeting in each class."

"Sure, Granger," he nods, feigning a yawn.

"So you just came to antagonize me, did you?" she asks.

"Actually, I came to see if you would join me for a walk around the grounds. I promised Luna that I would check on the thestrals while she's home."

With her face turned away from him, Hermione allows herself to grin momentarily before quickly replacing her expression with one of practiced indifference. "Sure, that sounds lovely," she replies.

The pair make their way through the forest in comfortable silence. Both of them are quite content to be in the company of the other, whether a single word is uttered or not.

Eventually, they arrive in the small clearing where the thestrals reside. The large bony figures approach the two humans cautiously, their white glittering eyes inspecting them closely. The largest of the two extend their black leathery wings in warning, should they have malicious intentions.

"Hello," Hermione says, approaching them with her hand outstretched.

"Be careful," Draco whispers.

"They're fine, I've ridden one before," she replies simply, offering the largest of the beasts a pat on their snout.

“I’m sorry, did you just say you’ve ridden a thestral?”

“Yes, why the tone of surprise?” she asks.

“Well, I thought you hated flying?”

“I hate flying on brooms, creatures are another matter entirely. I rode on Buckbeak as well.”

Draco grimaces at this reminder of his childhood behaviour. Sometimes he wishes he could go back in time and slap his younger self across the face. However, he quickly realizes that the witch beside him took care of that for him.

“Do you come down here often with Luna?” she asks.

“Yes,” he replies, glancing around.

“That’s nice of you,” Hermione smiles.

“I like Luna,” Draco admits. “Sometimes I feel like she can see right through me.”

Hermione is momentarily shocked by his honesty but understands entirely. “I’ve never really believed in divination, but something about Luna has me convinced.”

“Do you think Longbottom will make a move anytime soon?” Draco asks with a chuckle.

“I doubt it, he’s been pining after her for years,” Hermione replies with a grin.

Draco never thought that he would have much in common with the Gryffindor head of house, but as it turns out, he very well might.

December 24th, 2006, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

“Oh, Draco!” Luna exclaims with an airy sort of smile.

“Hello Luna,” he replies.

“Your aura is just lovely,” she grins. “Have you changed something recently? Perhaps your diet?” she asks curiously.

“Er, no, haven’t changed my eating habits,” he replies confusedly.

“Oh, Hermione, your aura has changed as well,” Luna grins the moment the witch joins them in the entryway. “It was a dull sort of yellow for a while, but it’s back to your usual gold.”

Draco smiles, quite enjoying the fact that even Hermione’s aura is supposedly gold. He can’t help but wonder what colour he is, but he doesn’t have the heart to ask.

“Where’s your ugly Christmas sweater?” Hermione asks, whacking Draco in the chest.

“Granger, it’s impossible for me to own anything ugly, you should know this,” Draco drawls, reaching out to pinch the reindeer’s head protruding from Hermione’s chest.

Never been jealous of a reindeer before , Draco thinks to himself.

“Well, lucky for you, I brought you one,” she grins, beginning to rummage through her beaded bag.

“How much are you able to fit in there?” Draco asks curiously, attempting to peer over her shoulder.

“None of your business,” she retorts. Not a moment later, she pulls an emerald green sweater from the bag.

“Well, at least it’s my colour,” Draco pouts.

“Look,” Hermione grins, unfolding the knitted fabric to reveal a pattern of Christmas lights, charmed to actually emit a soft glow. Draco rolls his eyes but opts not to argue. Much like with his mother, arguing with Granger is far more energy than it's worth. He removes the plain black sweater he’d opted to wear, his tight black t-shirt rising ever so slightly as he lifts the knit carefully over his head.

Hermione sucks in a sharp breath at the sight, quite enjoying the short glimpse she’s caught of his abdomen.

Once Draco is properly outfitted, the four professors step into the crisp December evening, Luna taking off at a surprisingly quick skipping pace.

“What do you think Sirius has made for dinner?” Neville asks.

Hermione smiles to herself, always loving just how obsessed Neville is with Sirius’s cooking. “I’m guessing a roast,” she replies. Neville’s face lights up at this, a slight pep now in his step.

Ever since Hermione joined Neville at Hogwarts, she’d sworn that she would always do her best to make the holidays an enjoyable time for him. Their visit to St Mungo's in fifth year had created a special place for Neville in her heart. After all, she knows perhaps better than anyone how hard it is to remain thankful that your parents are alive, yet simultaneously resentful because they haven’t a clue that you’re their child.

The Holidays are especially hard, a fact that remains true despite her parents having their memories back. While she knows that her parents certainly don’t hold their obliviation against her, there is a certain amount of trust that has been lost. They’d assured her that they understood it was for their own safety, but Hermione has hypothesized that the realization of just how much power their daughter had over them had led to a slight weariness in her presence.

She is both dreading and looking forward to visiting later on in the holidays. She’s always happy to see her parents, but the uncertain expressions they send her way are enough to make her skin crawl. She’s come to terms with the fact that things are unlikely to return to the way they once were, but it doesn’t make the whole ordeal sting any less.

“Granger?” she hears suddenly, those two syllables pulling her back down to reality.

“Sorry?” she asks sheepishly, turning toward Draco.

“My mother mentioned that you will be attending her New Year’s Gala?” he asks hesitantly, staring at his feet.

“Yes she invited me, I hope that’s alright. If you’d rather I not attend, I completely understand,” she starts to ramble in response.

“Granger,” he smiles, finally looking up to meet her glance. “Of course, I want you there.”

“Oh, well, in that case, I’ll be there,” she smiles.

“Yeah me too, Malfoy, just got the invitation last night,” Neville smiles. Hermione has to stifle a giggle at her dear friend's occasional obliviousness.

“Oh, yes, well, that’s lovely, Longbottom,” Draco replies.

The four arrive at the cottage with their cheeks tinged pink from the wind. Sirius tosses the door open with reckless abandon, a grin plastered on his face. His hair is wild, his face flushed – likely from the copious amounts of firewhiskey he had no doubt already consumed that evening.

But the best part of all is his green apron. At first glance, it appears to have a simple pattern of gingerbread men. Upon closer inspection, however, one will notice that all of the gingerbread men in question are smoking minuscule spiffs and the words “let’s get baked” sprawled across the front.

“Hi Sirius,” Hermione grins, pulling him into a hug.

“Hello, Miss Mione,” he smiles, ruffling her hair.

“Cousin,” he nods in Draco’s direction. His expression is serious at first, but he quickly allows a devilish grin to spread on his face when he notices Draco’s proximity to Hermione. Perhaps subconsciously, Draco had fallen into step behind the witch, remaining surprisingly close to her even when she moved forward to hug Sirius.

“Cousin,” Draco replies in his signature drawl.

“Longbottom, how you doing lad?” Sirius exclaims. “Visiting your parents tomorrow?” he asks.

Neville’s face drops, the mention of his parents no doubt sobering his attempts at enjoying his evening. “Yeah,” he nods.

“Good, I’ll come with you, Moony too,” Sirius smiles, patting him on the back. Hermione often forgets that Neville’s parents attended Hogwarts at the same time as Sirius and Remus. From the stories she’d heard, Frank had been quite close with the marauders, a fellow Gryffindor just one year above them. Alice, from what she could piece together, was best friends with Lily and the other Gryffindor girls in their year.

Thinking about their generation makes her heart ache, especially when she realizes just how many loved ones Sirius and Remus had lost over the years. Though she supposes her generation is following closely behind when it comes to tragedy.

The cottage is filled with a warm glow that seems to only exist in places filled with love. The smell of Sirius’s cooking wafts toward their noses the moment they step inside. Hermione smiles as she notices the Christmas tree, a large Douglas fir with multicoloured lights and homemade ornaments. Garland is hung around the bannisters of the stairs, and charmed fairy lanterns float about. Trays of

various baked goods line the tables, and an extremely outdated gramophone plays jazz Christmas tunes.

Hermione feels herself relax immediately. Even before she knew that she was a witch, Hermione has always been of the opinion that December 24th is a day far more magical than all the rest. As a child, the day would be spent out in the chilly December wind, admiring the Christmas market by her home, and debating with her parents which light display in her neighbourhood was best. Sometimes, they'd go ice skating, and sip on hot chocolate before returning home. There, she would warm her toes in front of the fire, curled up in a cozy pair of pyjamas with a good book.

She'd leave out sherry and mince pie for Father Christmas before heading to bed. She'd stare out the window as she drifted off to sleep, dreaming of the magical journey Father Christmas must be having. Sometimes, she'd try to stay up and catch a glimpse of him, but her droopy eyes always seemed to win.

But something about the twenty-fourth day of December has always felt otherworldly. At first, Hermione had always thought that this feeling was due to the anticipation of the following day and the gifts she would surely receive. But, as she got older, she realized this wasn't why the day felt magical at all. No, Hermione believes that in reality, the day is unlike any other. What sets it apart from the rest is the fact that for a twenty-four-hour period, we allow ourselves to simply exist.

On Christmas Eve, your everyday worries are tucked away, your mind allowing you to have brief moments of reprise to enjoy time with your friends and family. And this is exactly what Hermione intends to do that very evening.

"Mulled wine?" she asks, turning to Draco with a smile. He nods, following her into the kitchen. His eyes go wide as he watches Sirius float around the space, waving his wand as if conducting an orchestra. With the flick of his wand, a wooden spoon stirs a pot of gravy as he checks the temperature of the turkey.

Hermione diligently serves two mugs of the wine that has been left at a low simmer, dried oranges and cloves floating amongst the mixture. She watches eagerly as Draco takes his first sip, remembering quite well how life-altering her first experience with Sirius's famed mulled wine had been.

Sure enough, the wizard tips his head back with his eyes closed. "That's fantastic," he whispers, heartily taking another long sip.

"It is, isn't it?" Cassie asks, appearing suddenly as if out of thin air.

"Hello, Miss Lupin-Black," Draco nods.

"Professor Malfoy," she drawls, serving herself a mug of wine. She takes a big sip before refilling it to the brim once more. "I love the Holidays because you can get absolutely pissed and no one bats an eye," she declares with a devilish grin.

Draco has to stifle a laugh in an attempt to remain professional with the Slytherin.

"Make sure you make it through dinner, Cass," Hermione smiles, placing a kiss on the girl's cheek.

"Oh I will, I need to open your gift," she smiles.

Dinner passes in a haze of delicious food, more mulled wine, and full belly laughs.

Hermione has always believed that Sirius Black was born to entertain. In fact, she's certain that he could give many pureblood wives a run for their money. Dinners at the Lupin-Black cottage are always a momentous occasion. Not only are the meals exquisite, but the company as well.

Sirius is always sure to make eye contact with each and every guest at the table, nodding and actively listening to whoever is speaking at any given moment. He tells stories animatedly, filling in the needed details for those who require it so that all those present are able to enjoy the tale. He keeps their wine glasses full, and offers everyone second helpings, always jokingly promising to send each guest home with a doggy bag at the end of the evening.

After dinner, mince pies are passed around as they move into the living room. It had become a tradition since Cassie's very first Christmas at the cottage for her to open Hermione's gift on Christmas Eve.

Christmas Day is always spent at the Burrow – filled to the brim with rambunctious children. The tradition had been maintained over the years after Hermione's insistence that Cassie have a time that is entirely her own.

Sirius and Remus sit next to one another on the well-loved couch exchanging small smiles and kisses. Neville begins to nod off, his head eventually falling onto Luna's shoulder, his snores commencing a moment later. Draco sits on a wooden chair next to the tree, quite happy to observe the scene before him.

He'd seen many of these moments in Cassie's memories. Each year, without fail, Hermione presents her with a gift somehow even more heartfelt than the year prior. He's thrilled to be witnessing it for himself this time around.

Cassie tears the paper out of the shiny red bag with an expression of glee, her eyes going wide when she realizes what's inside.

Her very own beaded bag, highly illegal undetectable extension charm included.

After gifts have been exchanged, everyone agrees to leave Neville asleep on the couch. He appears quite comfortable, especially after Luna covers him with a knitted blanket and places a soft kiss on his forehead.

Luna steps through the floo to return home to her father's, while Hermione and Draco once again opt to walk back to the castle.

However, just before they leave, they find their feet frozen as if they're glued to the wooden floor beneath them. Glancing up, Hermione sighs as she discerns the cause of this kerfuffle: Mistletoe.

“Sorry kiddos,” Sirius shouts. “Can't leave until you smooch!”

Rolling her eyes, Hermione glances at Draco attempting to see how he feels regarding the situation. If she's being honest with herself – which she always tries to be – she's actually quite happy with the circumstances. However, their newfound agreement, or whatever the night of the Yule Ball had been is still quite recent, and she doesn't want to assume that Draco wants anything whatsoever.

“Shall we?” he whispers, his heartbeat quickening as he awaits her response.

Without replying, she brings her lips toward his, placing the quickest of pecks on his mouth. Her lips barely graze against his, just enough so that the charm will break.

Released from the spell, they step into the snow, yelling their goodbyes as they close the door behind them.

They remain silent as they make the familiar trek toward the castle, both pondering the mistletoe incident far more than they’re willing to let on. Hermione tilts her head back and closes her eyes, breathing deeply. She feels happy, euphoric even. She’s certain she’s currently experiencing what the French refer to as the *“joie de vivre”*.

Draco allows himself to stare at her unabashedly, loving nothing more than witnessing the rare occasion that is Hermione deciding to let loose.

“Granger?” Draco asks suddenly.

She perks up, turning to face him with a smile. “I got you something,” he continues, removing a small hand-wrapped gift from inside his coat.

“Oh!” she exclaims, eagerly accepting the gift.

“I got you something too,” she grins. She rifles through her beaded bag once more, her brow furrowed as she searches. “It’s in here somewhere,” she assures him. A split second later there’s a crashing noise and she groans, “that’ll be my books.”

Draco smiles to himself as he observes the sight. He’s always quite enjoyed just how flustered the witch gets – the way her face scrunches up in confusion as she bites her lower lip.

“Ah, here it is,” she exclaims, proudly removing a small wrapped box. She hands it to him with a grin. He nods, attempting to remain somewhat impassive. Internally, his heart is beating alarmingly fast.

Draco peels away the last layer of the wrapping on his gift, revealing a plain white box with a picture of some kind of device on it. “Granger, you know you’re going to have to tell me what this is,” he smiles sheepishly.

“It’s an iPod,” she replies, grabbing the box from him and pulling it open. “It’s similar to your walkman, but it doesn’t use CDs,” she explains. “You can load hundreds of songs on here.”

Draco nods, becoming quite stressed – he only knows ten muggle songs.

“I went ahead and loaded a few of my favourites on here,” she continues. “I was going to get you a red one as a joke, but I figured you’d prefer the green one,” she smiles, handing him the device.

“You just press that there, and the screen will light up.” Draco nods, following her instructions.

“Then you can drag your finger along the white circle there – yes, perfect!” Draco smiles to himself, quite pleased at how quickly he’s learning to navigate the device.

“Then, when the song you want to listen to is highlighted, you click the circle in the middle,” she continues. “Here, hold on, I’ll get the headphones.”

After removing the headphones from the box and plugging them into the iPod, she gently places one of the earpieces in his ear, and the other in her own. “There we go,” she smiles.

He scrolls through the songs, quickly locating one with a familiar title. He proudly clicks on the button to press play. The familiar drum beat causes Draco to nod his head in time with the music, already quite fond of his new device.

Hermione smiles to herself, quite enjoying that Draco chose one of the songs she’d shown him all those years ago.

“An eye pod? Is this meant to be an eye?” he asks, gesturing to the white circle.

“No,” she giggles. “I’m not sure why it’s called that, to be honest.”

“Are you going to open yours?” Draco asks, growing more and more nervous with every second that passes. Granger’s gift is, of course, excellent. He now worries that his will appear subpar in comparison.

“Oh, yes of course!” she smiles. Hermione gasps as she peels the wrapping back. “The Cranberries!” She flips over the CD, inspecting the tracklist. “Oh, I love this one,” she smiles. “Thank you, Malfoy.”

“Merry Christmas, Granger,” he smiles. A tiny voice in the back of Draco’s mind starts to speak, urging him to lean in toward the witch. He knows this is an ideal moment to finally kiss her – properly, not a quick peck under the mistletoe – something he’d been thinking about for weeks.

But, he reminds himself of how hesitant she’d been under the mistletoe, almost as if she was scared to kiss him. So, Draco decides that tonight isn’t the evening for such a thing, because the last thing he wants to do is make Hermione uncomfortable.

He doesn’t want to get ahead of himself and assume that their relationship will resume where they’d left off. No, Draco reminds himself that regaining Hermione’s trust will likely be a long and arduous process, one that he is all too happy to be a part of.

In fact, Draco realizes right then that he wouldn’t mind in the slightest if it takes years for them to return to where they’d been – he’s fairly certain he would wait a lifetime for Hermione Granger.

The Burrow, The Manor & A Queue

Chapter Notes

Welcome baaaackk! This is a flashback-heavy chapter along with some cozy Christmas vibes, enjoy! I have also completed my holiday dramione & nottpott fic which I will be posting starting December 2nd! Follow me on tiktok / insta / tiktok @embersofapril for updates!

P.s. I have added the cover art for this fic to the beginning of Chapter 1! It was done by the very talented @elivrayn.

Beta love ♥ to whits_end & a huge thank you to likelyunfinished and callcalypso for reading this chapter over & providing feedback !!

On the outskirts of Ottery St Catchpole in Devon, England, nestled amongst rolling hills and fertile meadows, is perhaps one of the most peculiar homes one could stumble upon. The Burrow is a wizard dwelling, and this is made quite clear by the way the home appears to be held up by sheer magical will and nothing else. What had once been a large stone pigpen now stands tall, extra rooms having been added here and there until the building became several crooked stories high with four or five billowing chimneys perched on top of the red roof.

Around the front door to this home is a jumble of worn wellies and very rusty cauldrons, and several fat brown chickens can be found pecking their way around the garden. In the summer, this garden is exactly what a proper garden should be; there are plenty of weeds, grass that needs cutting, and large gnarled trees all around the walls. Various plants of both mundane and magical origin spill from the flower beds that surround a large green pond filled with frogs. Gnomes run freely through the garden, wreaking havoc as they so please, fearing only Molly Weasley's monthly de-gnoming initiative.

To the left of the house is a large garage – Arthur Weasley's muggle artifact museum and home of the famed Ford Anglia. At the rear, a stone outhouse had been converted into a broom shed, housing all the Weasley children's and grandchildren's broomsticks. Just beyond is the orchard, one used as a makeshift Quidditch field for the Weasley family.

Though the Weasleys had been forced to abandon their home during the Second Wizarding War after it was targeted by Death Eaters, Arthur and Molly managed to re-establish their homestead soon after the Battle of Hogwarts. Their home, of course, became quite the photo op for wizarding history buffs following the war, and their family's associated status as war heroes.

Hermione is a firm believer that the Burrow is one of the coziest places she's ever been, even the Gryffindor common room paling in comparison. The home is filled with a jumbled array of furniture, but the clutter gives it a lived-in sort of feeling that Hermione adores. She loves the old wizarding radio that regularly plays Celestina Warbeck on repeat and the charming clock that shows the whereabouts of the red-headed family members rather than the time. She loves the ever-growing wooden table in the centre of the bustling kitchen with a variety of mismatched chairs.

Her favourite rooms, however, have to be the living room and Ginny's old bedroom. She adores the enormous fireplace with books that lay stacked three deep on the mantelpiece, and the colourful plush sofas and armchairs. Ginny's room is the only bedroom on the first floor, and though it is small, it is exceptionally bright and overlooks the orchard. Hermione had always stayed with Ginny during her stays at the Burrow, and as such, had grown rather partial to it.

Hermione has many fond memories of the Weasley family home, such as the days leading up to the Quidditch World Cup and Bill and Fleur's wedding, but none of these events will ever rival her memories of Christmas at the Burrow.

A large Douglas fir is always stuffed in the corner of the living room, with multicoloured charmed lights and handmade ornaments strung amongst the foliage. Though there had originally been only nine stockings hung on the mantel, this had quickly expanded to an abounding twenty-eight.

The Burrow had rapidly become cramped over the years, each of the Weasley children eventually marrying and having children of their own. Now, Arthur and Molly are grandparents to ten children, with one more on the way.

Rest assured that Christmas day at the Weasley household is a momentous occasion. Though many of the children have offered to host the tradition at their homes, the Weasley matriarch insists that her family come to the Burrow each year. And so, a large wizarding tent is pitched in the back garden every Christmas Eve, allowing all the Weasley cousins to spend time with one another while their parents reside in their old bedrooms.

Hermione had been fortunate enough to remain included in the festivities even after Ron and she had split ways, Molly insisting that she was just as much her daughter as the rest of them. After the war, Sirius, Remus and Cassie had been welcomed into the mix as well, both wizards having no families of their own to spend the day with. Cassie had been a hit with the children the moment they'd met her, all of them looking up to the Slytherin witch in awe. Victoire in particular clung to Cassie as if her life depended on it, hell-bent on being sorted into Slytherin house as a result.

When Hermione steps out of the floo bright and early on Christmas morning, a smile immediately spreads across her face as she takes in the scene before her. Ten small children run around the living room, each wearing Christmas-themed pyjamas. James and Frederick appear to be wrestling while Lily remains oblivious, curled up in the corner with a book. Victoire, the oldest of the group, attempts to wrangle Fiona and Roxanne who are in the midst of attempting to open gifts. Dominique sits with Molly II situated in her lap, cooing into the infant's ear, while Lucy and Louis pull at their grandfather's ears.

Charlie stands behind Tonks with his arms draped over her shoulders, speaking animatedly with Bill about the upcoming Puddlemere United game. Fleur and Audrey sit curled up on the sofa sipping on cups of spiced eggnog while Ginny and Angelina busy themselves in the kitchen with Molly, no doubt starting on the legendary Christmas morning brunch. Ron, Dean, Percy, and George are gathered around the table, placing bets on whose child will throw a tantrum first.

"Auntie Mione!" Lily exclaims, hopping up eagerly at the sight of the curly-haired witch. At this proclamation, many of the children perk up, all barreling toward Hermione with outstretched hands. Hermione preemptively takes a seat on the ground, allowing all the children to surround her in one big group hug.

"Presents!" Fiona screams, realizing what the arrival of her aunt means.

“Presents! Presents! Presents!” the children begin to chant. The chorus is led by Fiona and Roxanne, the twin girls wearing matching devilish expressions of glee that rivals that of their father.

“Presents!” Sirius yells as he steps through the floo, his hands filled with a large stack of colourfully wrapped boxes.

The children continue to jump and shout, their energy reaching an all-time high as Molly gives a nod. Arthur makes his way toward the chair next to the oversized tree, ready to take on his very important role of handing out gifts.

As the Weasley patriarch begins to call out the names of the various children, passing each of them an identical lumpy sort of package, Hermione grins. The children all rip into their gifts with equal fervour, grinning as they all pull on their matching sweaters. Hermione isn’t quite sure how Molly manages to make twenty-seven sweaters without going absolutely barmy, though she suspects that she must start preparations for the following year every boxing day. With a smile, she makes her way toward the grandmother, handing her a hand-knitted sweater of her own with a large M on the front.

“Oh Hermione,” the witch sobs. “You shouldn’t have,” she exclaims, her voice muffled as she pulls Hermione into a tight hug.

The morning passes in a blur of colourful wrapping paper and plenty of sweets and laughter. Once all the presents have been opened, the twenty-eight witches and wizards situate themselves around the dining table. Despite the charm placed on the wooden table, stretching it to almost three times its original length, now running from one end of the house to the other, the guests remain cramped. Everyone passes the various dishes around the table with a grin, many conversations taking place simultaneously.

The energy is warm and cozy, and Hermione smiles to herself as she takes it all in, more than thankful for her found family.

Malfoy Manor

Malfoy Manor is perhaps the diametric opposite of the Burrow. Where the Burrow is cluttered and cozy, the Manor is empty and barren. While the Weasley’s garden is filled with chickens, the Manor’s grounds contain albino peacocks, specially bred for the pureblood family. The Manor’s large, dimly lit and sumptuously decorated hallways are a stark contrast to the crowded Burrow, the pale-faced portraits lining the walls sneering at all those who pass.

Despite the coldness of the estate, Draco had always loved his home as a child, for it was all he’d ever known. However, ever since the Dark Lord had taken over the Manor, Draco hadn’t been able to view his home in the same light – it had become tainted in more ways than one. The grounds where he’d learned to fly had been used as Nagini’s nest and the drawing room where he’d taken tea with his tutors was now the setting of his most frequent nightmare.

He avoided the Manor at all costs, always insisting that his parents meet him for tea at his flat in London. But some days – such as Christmas day – were impossible to avoid. And so, on a particularly snowy December 25th, Draco sits to the left of his father at a comically large dining table with no one other than the three Malfoys to fill its seats.

“Thank you for joining us, Draco,” Narcissa smiles.

“Of course, Mother,” he nods.

“And how was your Christmas Eve with my dear cousin?” Narcissa asks casually.

“It was fine,” Draco replies simply, averting his gaze. He knows all too well that his mother will pounce the moment she sees a smile make its way onto his lips.

“And who all was in attendance?” Lucius asks.

“Lupin and Sirius, as well as their daughter Cassandra. Longbottom, Granger, and Lovegood as well,” he replies. He silently prays that his attempt to hide Granger’s name amongst the rest would be successful. He remains as still as possible, averting his gaze.

“Ah, Miss Granger was there, was she?” Lucius inquires, eyebrow raised.

“Yes, she is Cassandra’s godmother,” he explains, his tone slightly more clipped than intended.

“How lovely,” Narcissa smiles. “I am quite excited to meet this Cassandra on New Year’s Eve.”

“I wasn’t aware that you had invited the Lupin-Blacks,” Draco drawls.

“Why of course, Sirius is family after all,” Narcissa replies, her tone overly crafted.

“And Cassandra is adopted, I’m assuming?” Lucius asks.

“Yes, Father, they adopted her after the war,” Draco explains, his tone resembling Granger’s far too closely for his own liking.

“Were her parents Order members?”

“No. Death Eaters,” Draco replies

Lucius’ eyes go wide at this, clearly not having expected such a thing. “I see,” he nods, already mentally cataloguing who of the Dark Lord’s followers had had young children during the war.

“And no, they don’t know who her parents are,” Draco adds before either of his meddlesome parents can ask.

Narcissa tilts her head at this, the numbers not lining up. “But the girl, is she not seventeen?” she asks.

“Yes, and she suffered a severe head trauma during the war as a result of their neglect. She remembers nothing of her previous life.” Silence hangs over the room, all parties being forced to remember even momentarily the harsh realities of the war, and the Dark Lord’s followers in particular.

“Well, I’m certainly glad that Sirius and Remus took her in,” Narcissa adds, attempting to remedy the situation.

“Indeed, she is a formidable young witch. She is exceedingly bright, Head Girl and the Captain of the Slytherin Quidditch team.”

“Sounds like someone else I know,” Lucius smiles, glancing lovingly at his wife.

“You’ll like her, Mother,” Draco decides, hoping to put an end to the conversation.

Luckily, Narcissa recognizes his attempted closure immediately, transitioning the conversation with the practiced ease of a pureblood wife. “And have you asked Hermione to accompany you to the ball?”

Draco rolls his eyes, less than thrilled with the new topic his mother had selected and still exceedingly uncomfortable with his mother’s casual use of the witch’s given name. “No, Mother, I have not.”

“Well, seeing as you failed to do so last time, you must understand why I am adamant to pester you,” she smiles.

“Yes, Mother, I’m well aware, though I thank you for the constant reminders,” he drawls, stabbing at his crêpe with his fork in a very improper fashion.

“And do you intend to court Miss Granger?” Lucius asks, attempting to remain casual.

“No, Father, I do not.”

“So you do not wish to marry her?”

Draco bites his tongue, fully ready to lash out at his father. Yes, he *does* want to marry the witch, someday at least. However, the situation is far more complex than both of his parents are making it out to be. Dating is significantly more complicated when your marriage isn’t arranged for you by your parents. There is far more work and unknowns that go into forming a relationship with someone from scratch, something that his parents will probably never fully understand.

“Perhaps one day, Father, but you certainly shouldn’t hold your breath,” he replies coolly.

“Their children would be so lovely, wouldn’t they, Lucius?” Narcissa smiles, sipping her tea.

“Yes, so long as they inherit the Malfoy hair,” Lucius jokes.

Draco frowns at this, quite perturbed by his father’s comment. He’s always loved Granger’s curls, finding that they suit her personality exceptionally well. He’s always thought that her hair acts as almost an added layer of expression to Granger’s already transparent persona. When she’s frazzled, her hair puffs to an extent that matches her level of frustration. When she’s upset, he swears that the tips of her curls will spark. No doubt her magic is ready to lash out at whatever poor soul has wronged her.

But his favourite version of Granger’s curls is when they’re spread across his pillow, her cheeks flushed and lips swollen as she lays beneath him.

Draco reels his train of thought back in, decidedly not wanting to allow his memory to metastasize to such an extent that his body reacts. However, he opts to not comment on his father’s joke, knowing quite well that any sort of defence of the witch will only lead to more questions.

“And how are your classes, Draco?” his mother asks.

“They’re fine. The students do leave quite a bit to be desired, but I enjoy my N.E.W.T. classes.”

“Hermione mentioned that there was a love potion incident?” Narcissa prompts, always the conversationalist.

“Yes, Eleanor Selwyn’s son, Callum, slipped amortentia into a Gryffindor witch’s morning tea,” he explains.

“Yes, I spoke with Eleanor. She was furious with her son. Mortifying for the entire family, his father works at the Ministry after all,” Narcissa continues.

Draco has to stifle a laugh, always finding his mother’s need to gossip quite comical.

“Well, the apple certainly doesn’t fall far from the tree,” Lucius drawls.

“Quite right,” Narcissa nods.

The Burrow

After a delicious breakfast, the children all run around the house in a sugar-fueled craze, dragging a very hungover Cassie along with them. The adults remain at the table, quite content to simply exist whilst their children entertain themselves.

“So, Mione had a kiss under the mistletoe last night,” Sirius says out of nowhere with a devilish grin. Everyone at the table perks up at this, many of them wanting nothing more for Hermione than for her to find a significant other. Molly Weasley had been the champion of this, having attempted to set Hermione up with Charlie before he and Tonks had got together.

Hermione blushes, aiming a well-aimed kick at Sirius’s leg under the table. “It wasn’t anything special,” she argues. “A simple peck.”

“And who was the lucky wizard?” George asks, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Or witch!” Tonks adds.

Hermione remains silent, already dreading the reaction she will no doubt receive the moment Draco’s name leaves her lips. Half the table no doubt still holds a certain level of prejudice toward the Slytherin, while the other half knows about their prior *situationship*.

“Malfoy,” she mumbles under her breath.

Ginny begins clapping, clearly thrilled by the news. “Finally!” the redhead cheers.

“Again, it really wasn’t a big deal,” Hermione pleads, attempting to convey just how inconsequential the entire ordeal had been.

Except it really hadn’t been inconsequential at all. Hermione hadn’t stopped thinking about that kiss ever since. She felt like a starry-eyed schoolgirl, almost embarrassed by how giddy a brief peck had made her.

“Sure, Mione, whatever you say,” Ron smiles, thrilled that the witch had begun to put herself out there once more.

Nott Manor

After brunch with his parents, Draco immediately travels through the floo to Theo's home.

"Theo!" he hollers. "I need a drink!"

Theo comes around the corner with a bottle of Ogden's already open, two crystal glasses levitating next to him. "Ah, Draco, perfect timing as always," he smiles. "How were your parents?"

"Far too involved," Draco replies with a grimace, flopping onto the leather sofa. Theo pours him a glass of firewhiskey and hands it to him without a word.

"Are you coming to my mother's ball?" Draco asks.

"Yeah, of course, mate," Theo nods. "How else am I to find an eligible wizard?"

"If you want my mother to set you up on a slew of dates, you need only say the word," Draco drawls, tipping his glass back.

"Has she lined up any witches for you to dance with?" Theo asks.

Draco rolls his eyes, the reminder of the past six years an unwelcome one. "No, she hasn't," he replies simply.

"Has she officially given up on her only son?" Theo teases, refilling Draco's glass.

Draco stills, debating whether he has the energy to reveal the recent progress he and Granger have had. However, he quickly realizes that Theo will discover his secret quite quickly when he witnesses Draco waltz around the ballroom with her in a few days' time.

"She's hell-bent on me asking Granger, actually."

Theo raises his eyebrow at this, his expression one of surprise. "Oh?"

"Yes, she was even speaking of mine and Granger's future children today at brunch."

Theo lets out a barking laugh at this, his head falling back. "I love your mother," he exclaims. "And has the Golden Girl agreed to accompany you?"

"I haven't asked yet," Draco admits, suddenly acting very interested in Manor's grounds.

Hampstead, London

"Hermione!" Richard Granger exclaims, pulling his daughter into a hug.

"Hi, Dad," Hermione smiles.

"Hello, love," Helen grins, placing a delicate kiss on Hermione's cheek. "How was your morning with the Weasleys?"

"Quite chaotic, but perfectly lovely," she replies.

“I can’t imagine having ten children running afoot,” her father laughs. “Though I wouldn’t be opposed to a few little ones someday,” he smiles.

Hermione grimaces, always feeling oddly guilty when her parents attempt to discuss the topic of her future children. It only reinforces the ever-present feeling in her chest, the one that causes her to feel like she’s trailing behind. It’s a difficult one to face because Hermione’s never been one to be anything but ahead of the curve.

Ever since she was a child, she’s been top of her class and exceptionally mature for her age. She’d never experienced this feeling of discontentment, and it doesn’t seem to become any easier to come to terms with as the years wear on. She tries not to compare herself to her friends and family, constantly reminding herself that everyone’s paths differ. But it’s difficult, watching all her friends marry and have children, moving onto the next stage of her life while Hermione remains in a state of flux. She feels like she’s stuck somewhere awkwardly between her teenage self and the adult she feels she should be.

“Maybe someday, Dad,” she smiles.

“Have you been seeing anyone lately?” her mother asks kindly, leading them into the kitchen.

“Not really, though I have, er, become reacquainted with someone,” Hermione adds, taking a seat in the sunny kitchen. It always evokes a peculiar feeling, to exist in her childhood home, one that causes her to feel almost like an imposter.

“Oh?” her dad asks, his expression showing his genuine curiosity.

Hermione attempts to recall how much her parents know regarding her past with Draco. While their tryst had been ongoing, they’d still been in Australia, completely oblivious to her existence. It was always difficult to speak with them about anything that had been happening during her life. As a general rule of thumb, she tried to avoid such discussions whenever possible, dreading their uncomfortable reactions more than anything else.

“Yes, though I’m not sure if it will go anywhere,” she admits, though it stings to do so.

It’s not that she’s attempting to be pessimistic regarding the small moments that passed between her and Draco over the past few days. She’s simply choosing to remain realistic. She’s incredibly frightened of having her heart broken once again, well aware of the fact that it would hurt substantially more the second time around. The night prior, she’d decided that she would let him make the advances. It felt more logical to her that way, to allow him to set the pace.

Last time, it had been her to make the first move, after all.

December 6, 2000, King Street, Oxford

Draco stands in front of Hermione’s foggy mirror, casting a drying charm on his strawberry-scented hair. It had been quite the experience, using Granger’s shower instead of his own. He, of course, has an abundance of wizarding hair care products, most of which have very boring scents. Hermione’s muggle products, on the other hand, are scented like strawberries, vanilla, and coconut. He had far more fun than he cares to admit, sniffing all the various bottles and applying their contents to his body. He especially enjoyed something called a body scrub.

Not overly eager to put his sweaty quidditch attire back on, he wraps a towel around his waist and emerges into the main living area once more. He comes to a screeching halt when he notices Granger's current position. He's very confused by the way her body is contorted, her head is facing downward, arms stretched forward. Her feet are spread apart with her legs straight, her hips raised as high as possible.

He feels his hands grow clammy and his heart stutters as he observes her. He feels slightly creepy, lurking in the hallway, but he seems to have lost control over his limbs. His bare feet are frozen in place, his breath quickening with every slow movement the witch makes.

She peddles her feet, bending one knee after the other before eventually raising one leg straight behind her and contorting her body so that she's flipped, her face now facing upward. Draco hurries into the main area, not wanting to be caught watching her.

"Granger," he nods casually.

From her upside-down position, Hermione's eyes grow wide of their own accord, realizing that Draco Malfoy is standing in her living room half naked. She quickly flips herself around to face him, suddenly realizing how hot her apartment is. "How was your shower?" she asks, attempting to remain casual.

"It was fine," he nods. "Thank you again."

"Yeah, er, of course," she replies, seemingly unable to pull her gaze away from the white towel tied loosely around his waist. She marvels at the way his abdomen comes to a peak just above the fabric, her mind wandering to places she isn't willing to acknowledge at the current moment. "Did you want to go buy a cellphone today?" she asks.

"Sure, after lab?"

"That works," she smiles.

"Did you want to walk over together?" Draco asks, avoiding her gaze.

"That would be nice. Let's leave early so we can stop for a coffee."

Always prompt, Draco knocks on Hermione's door at 12:30 exactly. She tosses the door open, and Draco smiles to himself, knowing quite well that she'd been standing on the opposite side of the door, waiting for him to knock. She's wearing her usual muggle denims and a knitted white sweater. Her hair is tied into a loose bun with a few stray curls framing her face. Draco always marvels at the way the witch is able to look so effortlessly breathtaking at all times. He knows there are hundreds of charms and potions that witches can make use of to alter their appearance, but something about Granger's natural glow makes him certain that she needn't use any of them.

"Shall we?" he asks, receiving a small nod and smile in return.

The pair arrive at their usual coffee shop, the interior decorated for the upcoming holiday. "Hello," Draco smiles at the barista, now quite comfortable with the ordering process.

"Hi, you two," the girl smiles, quickly recognizing the regular customers.

“Two lattes please,” Draco smiles, counting out his muggle currency.

“Did you want to try the eggnog latte?” the girl asks. “We have it on special this month.”

Draco turns to Hermione, awaiting her confirmation. “Yes, that would be lovely,” she replies.

They head to their usual table by the window and take a seat, Draco smiling down at his latte. “We got hearts today,” he notes. Hermione grins, finding Malfoy’s obsession with his “coffee pictures” to be rather endearing.

“I’m eager to try combining Antimony and Bat spleen today. I think it may allow us to lower the required brewing temperature to below the threshold we identified,” Hermione begins, already switching her brain into academic mode.

“Why not Bitterroot?” Draco asks without missing a beat.

“I don’t think that will be strong enough for the soothing effect we’re hoping for,” Hermione explains.

“It might be if we try adding the Eye of Newt, like I mentioned last week.”

“We’ll see,” she replies, clearly dismissing the idea.

“Granger, are you forgetting that I’m meant to be working on the potion while you focus on the runes needed for the alchemical ritual?” Draco drawls.

“It’s a collaboration, Malfoy.”

“Yes, well, seeing as you’ve been working on both aspects, that’s hardly fair to you.”

“I don’t mind doing it,” Hermione replies quickly.

“Do you not trust me?” Draco asks, eyebrow raised.

Hermione’s eyes grow wide. “No, of course I do.”

“Then why do you hover behind me while I brew?” he retorts.

Hermione releases a sigh, sitting back in her chair. She hadn’t become accustomed to the whole notion of *trusting someone to do their work* quite yet. She knows that Malfoy is an exceptionally talented potioneer, but her old habits always seem to win out. After years of having to hover behind Ron and Harry, checking their essays and assignments, and taking on group projects entirely by herself, she honestly hasn’t a clue how to collaborate with someone.

“Okay fine, but I still need to know which ingredients you’re using, as that will impact my runes.”

“Yes, Granger, I’m aware.”

After a four-hour lab with much bickering and little progress, Hermione and Draco weave through the cobbled streets of Oxford toward the small technology shop nestled between a grocer and a men’s clothing store.

“Okay, repeat it back to me,” Hermione encourages.

“The Nokia 5190,” Draco repeats with an eye-roll.

“Perfect,” Hermione smiles, swinging the door open. The bell overhead jingles, alerting the shopkeeper of their arrival.

“Hello,” Draco says curtly, greeting the portly man behind the counter. “I’d like to purchase the Nokia 5190, please.”

The man nods. “Would you be interested in seeing the 3310 as well?”

Draco turns toward Granger, eyes wide as he realizes how unprepared he is for such a question. She quickly nods in response, respecting the fact that Draco had wanted to go through this process himself.

“Yes, that would be great,” Draco nods.

In the end, Draco purchases the 3310 – the more expensive of the two. “You know Malfoy, my 5190 works just fine,” Hermione argues.

“Yes, but the man said that this one is better,” he replies, eagerly tearing into the box.

“It’s not like broom models. They all do the same thing.”

“You’re just bothered that mine is better than yours, Granger,” Draco grins, purposefully baiting the witch.

“Alright fine, I won’t show you how to use it then,” she pouts.

“I’m only joking, Granger,” Draco clarifies quickly.

She purses her lips, clearly displeased.

“Oh Brightest Witch of Our Age, will you please help a troubled soul learn how to use his new cellphone?” Draco asks dramatically, stopping to bow in the middle of the busy street.

“Oh, for the love of Helga,” Hermione laughs, “let’s go home and I’ll show you.”

Draco feels a familiar flutter in his stomach, one that always seems to arise when Granger refers to their respective flats as a cumulative “home.”

“Okay, now call!” Hermione yells from her bedroom.

Draco furiously taps on the various buttons, clicking his only contact and then the call button Granger had shown him. He hears a song start to play from Hermione’s bedroom and smiles to himself, thrilled that he’d made his first call.

“Hello?” Hermione answers, pretending as if she doesn’t know exactly who is on the line.

“Hello!?” Draco shouts.

“Remember, you can speak at a normal volume, Malfoy,” Granger laughs.

“Oh, yes, right,” he replies with a grimace. “Well, it’s been lovely speaking with you, Granger, but I have lots of important calls to make, so we’ll have to continue this conversation at a later date,” he drawls.

“Oh yes, all of your contacts,” Hermione laughs. “Hang up the call then.”

Draco stares down at the phone, his brow furrowed. He clicks all the buttons he can see, convinced that eventually one of them will end the call.

“Malfoy, I can hear you clicking all the buttons,” Hermione says and Draco swears he can hear her grinning through the phone. Suddenly the call ends, and Draco releases an exasperated sigh.

After successfully calling his landlord, Hermione pulls out a bottle of pinot noir, declaring the event worthy of celebration.

“Granger, this is hardly an accomplishment that warrants a bottle of wine,” Draco drawls, secretly quite pleased with her reaction.

“First of all, yes, it is. It’s important to celebrate the small things, Malfoy. Secondly, this is a cheap bottle of wine, so it’s not as if I broke the bank for the occasion,” she grins.

“Did you want to order Chinese takeaway?” she asks, knowing quite well how much Draco enjoys the Kung Pao chicken, though he has yet to admit to such a thing.

“Only if you insist,” Draco replies, taking a swig of the wine. He makes a face, scrunching his features up at the taste.

“Sorry, Malfoy, this isn’t elf-made wine that’s been aged since the Norman Conquest. It’s muggle wine from Tesco.”

Without a word, Draco stands and leaves the apartment. Hermione balks, wondering if her cheap wine had really offended Malfoy to such an extent. However, the moment she hangs up the call with the Chinese takeaway, he returns, two expensive bottles of wine in hand.

“Sorry, Granger, I have a refined palette,” he jokes.

After consuming an exorbitant amount of takeaway and a bottle of wine each, Draco and Hermione’s cheeks become more and more flushed with every moment that passes, their inhibitions lessening in tandem.

“You prat,” Hermione laughs as she whacks him across the chest. “You shouldn’t be flirting with a witch whom you have no intentions of ever actually dating.”

“Why not, Granger? It’s fun,” Draco replies with a smirk, his head laid back against her sofa.

“Because, that’s not fair to the poor girl. You’re getting her hopes up,” she retorts.

“I consider it practice,” he replies jokingly.

“Practice for what?” Hermione asks, aghast.

“For when I need to use my charm on a witch that I *do* have the intentions of dating,” he explains.

“Oh yes, your *charm*,” Hermione teases with air quotes.

“Do you not find me terribly charming, Granger?” Draco asks, turning to face the witch with a devilish grin.

“I find you tolerable at best, Malfoy,” Hermione replies, though her tone betrays her, her words sounding breathier than she’d intended.

“I’ll take it,” Malfoy grins. “Certainly a step up from a foul, *loathsome evil little cockroach*, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” Hermione admits. “But if we’re discussing the use of insults, I’d argue that you’ve grown quite fond of me,” she jibes.

Draco’s breath catches, the unwelcome reminder of his childhood prejudice acting like a cold splash of water. “I suppose I have, haven’t I?” he admits, his tone suddenly serious.

Hermione feels her heart skip a beat at this declaration. Surely he couldn’t have meant that he’d grown fond of her romantically? No, he must mean as friends, or perhaps even colleagues. Though they had been spending quite a bit of time together as of late, in fact, they’d grown practically inseparable. There’d been a few moments here and there that had caused Hermione to wonder if Draco would ever view her as anything more than just a friend.

“Yes, well, get in line, Malfoy,” she teases, attempting to steer the conversation back to its playful origins.

“I wasn’t aware that there was a queue that I could be a part of,” Draco replies quickly.

Hermione’s chest constricts, her body suddenly growing hot and her breaths short. She realizes just how little space remains between the two of them, a few inches at most. The scent of fresh parchment and peppermint causes her mind to grow hazy. “I wasn’t aware that you would want to stand in my queue,” she adds, her voice almost a whisper.

Draco turns his face toward the witch, his body following suit. “Granger,” he begins, planning his words carefully. “I’m quite content to stand in the queue for as long as you wish, though I am an impatient man.”

His words wash over her, each syllable cascading over her skin as she finally decides to act on the impulse she’d been ignoring for some time now. “And if I moved you to the front of the queue?” she whispers, her eyebrow raised.

Draco’s eyes go wide, wondering if he’d perhaps fallen asleep and drifted away into a scenario he’d only ever experienced in his dreams.

But as Granger’s lips come crashing into his, he knows for certain that this is real, because never once had his dreams caused his hands to shake the way they are at this very moment. The witch shifts toward him on the couch, and the second he deepens their kiss, she brings her hands to his neck, pulling him even closer. She nips at his lower lip, pulling it gently before allowing it to snap back into place. With a groan, Draco pulls her toward him, lifting her easily over his lap. She situates herself immediately, placing one leg on either side of his hips, lowering herself delicately

onto his lap. She releases a breathy sigh as they come into contact, continuing to kiss him in a frenzy – the crescendo of months' worth of tension.

Draco feels a smile spread across his face, wholly believing that he's the luckiest man alive.

The Faintest of Embers

Chapter Notes

Welcome to just past the halfway point! Feels fitting that we celebrate 22 chapters with New Year's Eve :)

I am super excited about this chapter, and I hope you all love reading it as much as I did writing it.

As always, please follow me on TikTok / Instagram / Twitter @embersofapril for updates!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end and a huge thank you to likelyunfinished and callcalypso for reading this chapter & providing feedback !! This fic would not be what it is today without this lovely team!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ambition, resourcefulness, determination, and cleverness are some of the various traits associated with Slytherin house. These traits are, of course, all important in their own way, each lending themselves to the witches and wizards of the house as a tool to wield however they see fit. However, as with any trait that a person can possess, there is both a positive and negative spin that can be put upon them, each characteristic a two-sided coin. A witch or wizard who is ambitious, and chooses to use this aspiration for good, will typically be universally respected, perhaps becoming an elected official or a champion of a charitable cause. The other side of the coin, however, is something to be wary of, for a witch or wizard who is ambitious and hungry for power is one who should be feared.

Of the various members of Slytherin house, many graduate and go on to become politicians, each with their own agenda rooted in their own self-preservation. Some attend a mastery, putting their cleverness to good use. Others, however, appear to do *nothing* to those who are blind to the work that occurs behind the scenes of wizarding society.

Narcissa Malfoy is an exceptionally clever witch. Many of her peers throughout her time at Hogwarts often asked themselves why she hadn't been sorted into Ravenclaw house, as her exam scores kept her consistently at the top of her class. But it is Narcissa's resourcefulness and determination that caused the sorting hat to place her in the house of snakes, for she is a witch that is composed of just as much vigour as she is ambition.

Many folks in the wizarding world view Narcissa Malfoy as a pureblood housewife and nothing else, a mere accessory to her much more ambitious husband. And while these opinions of the witch are wholly inaccurate, Narcissa is all too happy to allow them to circulate, clever enough to recognise that people's perceptions of her are a tool like any other.

She knows quite well that anyone who views her merely as a simpering housewife will never suspect that she has far more of an impact on wizarding society than anyone realises, and she's determined to keep it that way.

Narcissa is a champion of many causes, always ensuring that the Malfoy funds are donated wherever they are needed most. Lucius is more than happy to allow her unsupervised access to his chequebook, offering only his signature before the funds are transferred out of his account. If one was to look closely – which they rarely do – one may notice that a vast majority of the economy of wizarding Britain is thanks to none other than the Malfoy family, and Narcissa Malfoy in particular.

While Lucius Malfoy has always been a wizard who enjoys the finer things in life, such as aged elf wine, the latest racing brooms, and dragonhide shoes, he is also a rather simple man. At the end of the day, he desires nothing less than verifying their finances and selecting charities to whom they may donate. Narcissa on the other hand has always had quite the knack for such things and is more than happy to oblige.

A successful witch is not one who seeks power to control, but one who wields their power with a well-thought-out plan. This is a skill that Narcissa acquired long ago and employs in many areas of her life, as well as her son's.

"Hermione dear, it is so lovely to see you," Narcissa smiles, pulling the witch into a hug.

"Thank you for meeting with me, Narcissa," Hermione replies, attempting to steady her shaking hands.

"I have yet to dine in this establishment, but I have heard lovely things," Narcissa smiles, taking her seat and crossing one ankle over the other.

Hermione attempts to replicate this motion, determined to not make a fool of herself. She'd spent far too long getting ready for a simple tea, though she supposes that the tea is, in fact, *anything but* simple. She knows quite well that this Rendez-Vous serves purposes other than a simple discussion of alchemy for the Slytherin witch, purposes she has yet to discern. If she was to guess, however – which she had done at length on her short walk through Diagon Alley – she would presume that this meeting has everything to do with her and Draco, and absolutely nothing to do with alchemy.

"It looks fantastic," she replies, flipping through the menu. The establishment that Narcissa had selected is a fancy sort of place, the tables covered in white linens, with crystal chandeliers hung overhead – certainly nowhere that Hermione would frequent on her own. The menu is filled with nothing of sustenance, small sandwiches and an extensive list of teas from around the world. She peruses the options, knowing very well she'll order her usual earl grey.

The two witches place their orders, and Narcissa smiles as she notes that Hermione and her son take their tea the exact same way: two spoonfuls of honey and a dash of milk. She knows this could very well be a coincidence, but is not so naive as to believe that it is.

The two witches exchange pleasantries for a quarter of an hour, both conversing while simultaneously waiting for the other to bring forth the real topic of discussion. Finally, after deeming it socially acceptable, Narcissa speaks the words that Hermione had been anxiously waiting to hear since her arrival.

"Now, Hermione, I mentioned to dear old Argo that I was going to be discussing his research with you today," Narcissa begins. "He is quite eager to hear from you regarding your thoughts."

Hermione's eyes grow wide at the fact that the famed Alchemist would want to meet with her. Hermione frequently forgets that she is a celebrity – and a war hero at that. "Oh, wow, yes, I'd love

to speak with him,” she grins, anxiously jostling her leg under the table.

“He is a lovely man. I would be more than happy to set up a meeting for the two of you,” Narcissa adds. “Though he may attend my New Year’s Eve Ball, perhaps you could speak with him there.”

“Oh, that’s so soon!” Hermione exclaims, already fretting about how much reading and researching it will take for her to feel adequately prepared for such a discussion.

“Here you are,” Narcissa says as she places a small packet on the table in front of Hermione.

The curly-haired witch flips through the pieces of parchment immediately, momentarily forgetting that this may be considered rude. Narcissa, however, doesn’t mind in the slightest and is more than content to sit and observe the witch who has captured her son’s affections for so long.

Hermione skims the introduction, nodding as she reads.

Professor Argo Pyrites, PhD

Tenured Professor, Department of Alchemy

University of Naples Federico II / Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

One of the main purposes of alchemy has always been discovering a cure for disease and a way of extending life. Superficially, the chemistry involved in alchemy appears to be a hopelessly complicated succession of heating multiple mixtures of obscurely named materials, but it seems likely that a relative simplicity underlies this complexity. The metals gold, silver, copper, lead, iron, and tin were all known before the rise of alchemy.

“Transmutation” is the key word characterising alchemy, and it may be understood in several ways: in the changes that are called chemical, in physiological changes such as passing from sickness to health, in a hoped-for transformation from old age to youth, or even in passing from an earthly to a supernatural existence.

Systems of five almost identical basic elements were postulated in China, India, and Greece, according to a view in which nature comprised antagonistic, opposite forces—hot and cold, positive and negative, and male and female; i.e., primitive versions of the modern conception of energy.

Alchemy was not original in seeking these goals, for religion, medicine, and metallurgy had preceded it. The first chemists were metallurgists, who were perhaps the most successful practitioners of the arts in antiquity. Their theories seem to have come not from science but from folklore and religion. The miner and metallurgist, like the agriculturalist, in this view, accelerate the normal maturation of the fruits of the earth, in a magico-religious relationship with nature.

The ailment lycanthropy has been prevalent in our world since the dawn of time. All those infected are linked through Lycaon, the son of Pelasgus, who angered the god Zeus when he served him a meal made from the remains of a sacrificed boy. As punishment, the enraged Zeus turned Lycaon and his sons into wolves.

It is crucial to note, however, that those living with lycanthropy are not inherently evil nor dangerous when in their human form, and should consequently only be feared during the twenty-four-hour period of the full moon each month.

A Cure for Lycanthropy has been long sought after. The creation of the wolfsbane potion by Damocles Belby in the second half of the twentieth century is an innovative and complex treatment, though not a cure. The principal ingredient in this silver-toned potion is wolfsbane (also referred to as aconite or monkshood). The way one must imbibe it is very unique among potions, in that a goblet full of wolfsbane potion must be taken each day for a week preceding the full moon; missing one dose alone, during such a night, is enough to invalidate all those that preceded it.

While this potion has been life-altering for many infected by lycanthropy, it does not come without drawbacks, most notably in the realm of accessibility and equity. This potion is extremely difficult to make, and the ingredients are also costly, which makes it difficult for some werewolves to brew it themselves, as they are 62% more likely to live in poverty due to their difficulty in finding stable careers.

Lycanthropy has always been at the forefront of my studies as an alchemist, an ailment that I believe is my life's mission to cure. After the Second Wizarding World, there has been a distinct rise in cases of Lycanthropy due to Voldemort's extensive weaponisation of those infected. I believe that through the culmination of alchemy and the properties of the wolfsbane potion, a cure may be found for this ailment, a feat that would drastically alter the lives of many.

Hermione's mind spins, taking in the information on the table in front of her. "Please tell Dr. Pyrites that I will be ready to speak with him on New Year's Eve," she says quickly. This research that the wizard had started could *indeed* drastically alter the lives of many – most notably Remus's. But, as she allows her brain to run free, already attempting to make connections and form hypotheses, she realises another reason why this research needs to be expedited.

Just as he'd mentioned, there were many who were infected by Greyback and his followers throughout the war, the majority of whom are children. These children would reach the age of eleven quite soon, and as the current laws stand, wouldn't be able to attend Hogwarts because of their condition.

Hermione is certain that she can feel her neurons firing, excited at the prospect of a new project. While lycanthropy had always been at the back of her mind, she'd never given the topic her full and undivided attention. But Hermione has always loved to take on a cause, and as she slips the parchment into her bag, she can already identify the telltale signs of determination coming to the forefront of her consciousness.

If she could help this researcher find a cure for lycanthropy, all the children affected by the ailment would be able to live normal childhoods and attend Hogwarts. She'd found a cure for Dragon's Fever before – her specialty now alchemical approaches to healing – so a project such as this seems like the next logical step.

But she hadn't done it alone.

The treatment for Dragon's Fever had been a joint effort between her and Draco. And while it pains her to admit it, she wouldn't have been able to do it without the potioneer.

"Have you mentioned this research to Draco?" Hermione asks cautiously.

"I haven't," Narcissa replies simply.

"Do you think it would be alright with Dr. Pyrites if Draco was involved as well?"

“I don’t think he would mind at all. In fact, I think that’s a fantastic idea,” Narcissa smiles.

After Hermione hastens out of the restaurant, thanking Narcissa with a grin, the blonde witch sits back and sips her tea, quite happy with the outcome of this Rendez-Vous.

December 31, Potter Manor

“Auntie Mione, you look like a princess,” Lily smiles, dangling her feet off of the wooden bench at the end of Hermione’s guest bed.

“Thank you Lils,” Hermione grins. “How’s your book?”

“I like it a lot!” Lily exclaims. “Mum’s going to take me to the library tomorrow. I already read all the books I got for Christmas.”

Hermione smiles down at the small redheaded witch adoringly. Lily Potter is a reincarnation of her namesake, according to Sirius and Remus. She’s kindhearted, yet equally witty and quick, able to verbally spar with her brothers with ease. Hermione is eagerly awaiting the witch’s sorting, convinced that she could thrive in any of the four houses.

“In a year or two, I can lend you some of my old textbooks if you want,” Hermione offers, fastening her pearl earrings.

“Yes please, Mum and Dad didn’t keep theirs,” Lily replies, clearly displeased with her parents.

“Mioneeeeeee!” James hollers, knocking on the door. Lily rolls her eyes, not quite ready for her one-on-one time with her aunt to end.

“You can come in, James,” Hermione replies, casting one last beauty charm on her curls. She’d opted to leave them down this evening, but had tamed them into submission.

“Mum says she needs your help,” James says immediately, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“Is everything ok?” Hermione asks quickly.

“Yes,” the curly-haired boy replies as he turns and skips off. Much like Lily, James is the embodiment of his namesake, almost alarmingly so. For Christmas, many of the children received toy brooms. James had already crashed his twice but didn’t seem deterred in the slightest.

Picking up the base of her navy blue gown, Hermione makes her way toward the Primary Bedroom, giggling at the sight of Ginny attempting to shimmy into her very form-fitting gown.

“Mione, I can’t get this thing over my arse,” Ginny complains. “I swear it’s getting bigger.”

“Your arse is perfectly lovely, Gin. You’re a professional athlete, you’re going to gain muscle every now and then,” Hermione replies, casting a discreet charm to loosen the fabric a fraction of an inch. She helps the witch pull, and Ginny sighs in relief when the fabric falls into place.

“Where’s Harry?” Hermione asks, certain that he would have been more than happy to help his wife with such a task.

“Packing the kiddo’s stuff for the evening,” she replies, casting beauty charms on her already perfect hair.

“Ron and Dean are sure they don’t want to come tonight?” Hermione asks.

“Yeah, Ron has no interest in society events of any kind,” Ginny replies. “To be fair, neither do I, but I love an excuse to get dressed up and make Harry foam at the mouth.”

Ginny turns to face Hermione, giving her a full up and down. “There’s a reason you were my bi-awakening, Mione, you look hot,” she grins. “Are you excited for tonight?” she asks, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively.

“Mostly nervous,” Hermione admits, picking at her nail beds. “But also excited,” she adds with a smile, recalling the bouquet of tulips that had arrived two days prior with a small note attached to the eagle owl’s talons.

Granger;

My tie for the New Year’s Eve ball is navy, so I took the liberty of ordering you a matching gown from Maison Capenoir. It will be delivered on the morning of the event.

Regards,

A foul, loathsome, evil little cockroach.

Hermione had grinned when she read the letter, realising that this was Draco’s way of asking her to attend with him. Some may find his wording to be crass, but she found it endearing. Over time, she’d realised that this is the case with most aspects of Draco’s personality – you have to look past his words to understand the intended meaning.

She’d eagerly waited for the gown to arrive and had gasped when she’d pulled it out of the box. She tried not to think about how much the gown had likely cost, the diamonds stitched into the hem an indicator that it was far beyond any budget she would have set for herself.

She also found it quite charming that Draco had known she hadn’t purchased a gown yet. Truth be told, she had fully planned to wear her Yule Ball robes once more, finding dress shopping to be exhausting.

But as she catches a glimpse of herself in Ginny’s mirror, she can’t help but grin. Draco had picked the perfect dress, truly. Paired with heels, the skirt fell just above the floor with a slit for her left leg. The neckline is a deep V-shape, but not revealing enough that Hermione feels uncomfortable. The dress hugs her in all the right places, yet doesn’t cling to her uncomfortably. Her favourite part, however, is her exposed back, thin chains of silver falling loosely across her skin.

She’s certain that the dress had been made especially for her, a realisation that sends a familiar sensation cascading through her being – a glimmer of hope.

At five minutes to seven, Hermione, Harry and Ginny stand in front of the Potter’s floo. “You look nice, Mione,” Harry smiles as Ginny fiddles with his bowtie.

“Guess where she got the dress,” Ginny adds. Hermione can’t see the witch’s face, but she can picture her meddlesome grin without needing visual confirmation.

“Er, the store in Diagon?” Harry guesses, oblivious.

“Malfoy,” Ginny replies, her tone giddy.

“Oh!” Harry exclaims. “Are you two an, er, item?” he asks, clearly feeling quite awkward.

Hermione stills. *Are they?* “I’m not really sure, to be honest. I don’t think so,” she replies.

“Well, you may want to tell that to Malfoy, Mione, because this gown suggests otherwise,” Ginny replies, looking the witch up and down.

Hermione’s heartbeat quickens, and she suddenly has the overwhelming urge to hide. But, for the time being, she forces these feelings out of her mind, straightens her posture, and passes through the floo.

The trio steps through the Floo at Malfoy Manor, quickly joining a lengthy queue of immaculately dressed witches and wizards. Hermione feels a sense of relief, realising just how thankful she is that Draco had sent this gown – she would have been sorely underdressed otherwise.

The manor had obviously been renovated after the war, the once eerie corridors now airy and bright. Christmas garland is strung along the bannister, flickering candles floating above the crowds.

She looks around anxiously, attempting to catch a glimpse of Draco’s snowy-blond hair. The queue steadily progresses, and as they approach the hosts, Hermione’s heart sinks. Draco isn’t with them.

Where is he?

“Mate, it’s going to be fine. Here, have another swig,” Theo smiles, attempting to comfort his friend.

“I shouldn’t have just bought the dress and forced it upon her, Theo, she probably hated that,” Draco exclaims, dutifully taking a long sip of Theo’s firewhiskey.

“At least you sent flowers mate, that was a nice touch,” Theo assures him, patting on the back.

“Oh, gods what if she doesn’t come?” Draco asks.

“Well, I don’t think you have to worry about that,” Theo smiles. Draco opens his mouth to disagree, but before his words can leave his mouth, Theo glances to their left.

Draco follows his line of sight, his eyes falling on a witch in a beautiful navy blue gown. His breath catches as he pulls at his tie, attempting to loosen its suffocating grip around his neck.

The witch glances around the room with a worried expression on her face, but the moment her eyes find him, her features shift into a relieved grin. Avoiding the hordes of witches and wizards around her, many of whom are attempting to get her attention, she makes a beeline for Draco.

“Hi,” she greets him breathlessly.

“Hi,” he replies, his eyes unmoving.

“Hi Granger, a pleasure to see you,” Theo grins wildly, quite amused by the hopeless pair.

“Oh, Theo!” she exclaims, as if just noticing his presence. “You’re looking well,” she smiles. Draco feels an unplanned frown make its way onto his face at this declaration.

“You as well, Granger, this dress is fantastic,” Theo adds.

“Oh, thank you,” she blushes. “Thank *you*, by the way,” she adds quickly, turning to face Draco. “I love it.”

“I’m glad,” Draco beams.

“Thank you for the tulips as well, they’re my favourite flower,” she smiles.

“It’s my pleasure, Granger,” Draco replies, his palms growing clammy. He specifically doesn’t admit to the fact that he’s bought the tulips for that specific reason. This fact had been stored for many years at the back of his mind in an ornate box along with the rest of the things he’d opted to remember about the witch. How she takes her tea, her favourite book, her favourite colour, her favourite candy, and topics that are a surefire way to send her off on a tangent.

The awkward energy currently flowing between them – neither of them quite sure how to act – causes him to feel the overwhelming urge to start an argument of some kind. It’s as if he suddenly forgets how to behave when they speak cordially and partake in civil conversation and pleasantries, their usual banter a much more familiar comfort to him.

“I see you managed to tame the curls for an evening,” he tries, her hair an easy target despite just how much he adores the curls in question. He decides that he’s quite happy that she’d opted to leave them down for this evening. His mind wanders, his fingers twitching as he envisions pulling them through the honey-brown tendrils.

“Yes, I figured if we were going to dance this evening, you’d hardly want to be inhaling my hair,” she quips back.

“So thoughtful of you, Granger,” he replies with a playful smirk.

As he watches Hermione converse animatedly with some old tosspot, Draco decides he may have to turn into a murderer after all. He hasn’t the foggiest clue who this man could be, but also *doesn’t care in the slightest*. He could be the bloody king of England, he thinks, and he would still be upset that Granger had spent the past hour wrapped up in a conversation with this man.

What could they be talking about that’s holding her attention for so long?

Taking a swig of bubbly, he marches toward them, determined to get to the bottom of this whole ordeal. All he wants is one dance with his witch, and he’ll be damned if this mad hatter gets in the way.

“Granger,” Draco drawls, guiding his palm to her back. He places it at a respectable height, nothing suggestive by any means, but a territorial gesture nonetheless.

“Oh, hello,” she smiles. “This is Dr. Pyrites of the University of Naples, a friend of your mother’s.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” Draco smiles, extending his hand cordially.

“Ah Mr. Malfoy, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you!” the man grins. “I was just discussing my latest research with Ms. Granger here.”

“Oh?” Draco asks.

“Yes, he’s been experimenting with the possibility of utilising alchemy to cure lycanthropy,” Hermione beams, clearly thrilled.

Draco feels his heartbeat slow significantly. Of course Granger had been enthralled in discussion with this man. Not only does the conversation include her area of expertise – alchemical healing – but also a topic that is dear to her heart – lycanthropy.

“That’s fascinating. I’m sure you know it was Ms. Granger who developed the treatment for Dragon Fever?” Draco asks, always eager to bring Hermione’s accomplishments forth.

She blushes next to him. “That was a joint effort! We collaborated on that project.”

Draco shifts his posture ever so slightly as she speaks, his pointer finger gently grazing the exposed skin of her back. Hermione can feel a shiver course through her veins, a slight flutter appearing just below her abdomen.

“I was going to ask you to help, actually,” she smiles, glancing toward him.

“Help with what might I ask?” Draco replies.

“Dr. Pyrites has asked if I’d take a look at his preliminary findings and attempt to identify any patterns amongst the data set. I was thinking that we could cross-reference it with the original trials from the wolfsbane potion. I also recall an Egyptian alchemical process that may be relevant to us as it corresponds with the lunar cycle...” she begins to ramble.

Draco smiles to himself as he observes. He’s always adored the way Hermione’s face lights up when she’s passionate about something – her various trains of thought illuminating her honey-brown irises with tiny specs of gold. He loves the way small dimples appear on her cheeks when she genuinely smiles, her eyebrows raised in excitement.

“Of course, I’ll help,” he smiles. To be honest, Draco had had no intentions of taking on such a large-scale research project on top of his existing workload, but he was fairly certain that the witch could ask him to pet a Manticore and he’d march happily forward, arm outstretched.

“Excellent,” Dr. Pyrites claps, “I’m confident that with two brilliant young minds on the case, we should be able to overcome the various roadblocks I’ve encountered.”

As much as Draco is sympathetic towards the cause, he’s mostly eager about this newfound excuse to spend more time in Granger’s presence. In fact, he decides he will happily throw himself into this research wholeheartedly. They’d fallen in love once before whilst in the depths of a research project, and Draco hopes that perhaps the return to familiar circumstances will be enough fuel to reignite the fire that had been stifled for far too long. He can feel the embers burning still, a faint

glimmer of the flames that once had been. But Draco remains optimistic, for a flame can be reignited from even the faintest of embers.

As the conductor raises his arms and the musicians all shift into their starting positions, Draco wraps his arm tightly around Hermione's waist. His breath catches as he feels his palm come into contact with her exposed back, thanking himself for the forethought involved in purchasing this gown.

"Look at us, Granger, a proper dance this time," he grins, raising his eyebrows in unison. Before she can reply, the first note reaches their ears, and Draco begins moving them fluidly through the first steps.

She leans in so that her mouth is mere inches from his face. "I think I prefer our previous dance. Far more intimate," she whispers.

Draco sucks in a sharp breath, focusing all of his mental capacity on remaining calm. "This isn't intimate enough for you, Granger?" he whispers in reply, pulling her body flush against his as they float around the space.

"I prefer when it's just us," she smiles, the four glasses of champagne she'd consumed providing her with the courage to say the things she's always thought, but never uttered.

"Duly noted." He grins, tracing his pointer finger over the exposed skin of her back. Hermione shivers involuntarily, his touch causing a hazy feeling to sweep through her mind.

The next few moments pass in a blur of movement, touches, and breathy whispers. When the last note is played, the last violin string comes to a standstill, Hermione is certain that she hasn't been this sexually frustrated since, well, *Oxford*.

"Mione!"

Hermione whips around at the sound, her eyes landing on a very-clearly intoxicated Cassie.

"Hi Cass," Hermione giggles. "Have some champagne, did we?"

"Yes, my fathers are far too busy being disgustingly in love to keep an eye on me," the Slytherin replies with a devilish grin. "Seems to be a frequent occurrence this evening," she winks. Hermione purses her lips and aims a glare in her goddaughter's direction, releasing her hand from where it had lingered by Draco's side.

"Well, enjoy yourselves you two. Don't do anything I wouldn't do," Cassie winks, disappearing into the crowd once more.

"Sorry about her," Hermione whispers.

"Don't be. I find Cassandra to be an exemplary member of Slytherin house," he laughs reassuringly, brushing a small fleck of dust away from her cheek. His hand freezes the moment he realises what he'd done, the intimate touch transpiring as if by second nature. His thumb lingers on her flushed cheekbone, holding his breath as he awaits his reaction.

Her irises gleam, an infectious sort of expression staring back at him. He swears he can hear her mind whirring, attempting to conceptualise the various different outcomes of the situation and calculating their likelihood.

Draco allows his thumb to drag slowly across her cheek, his other fingers cupping her jaw as he keeps his gaze locked on her. He watches her chest rise and fall, her lips parting ever so slightly as if she's about to speak.

"Come with me," he whispers, smiling as she nods without uttering a word. Draco has always taken great pride in his ability to render Hermione Granger speechless.

He laces his finger between hers and winds them through the crowd, the pair catching glimpses of their various coworkers, friends and family.

Narcissa and Lucius stare at one another adoringly as they float through the room, conducting polite conversations with each one of their guests. Neville and Luna can be spotted off to the side of the crowd, their heads bowed in a silent whisper. Harry and Ginny laugh jovially with Bill and Fleur while Remus and Sirius spin each other around the dancefloor, their pace not matching the tempo in the slightest.

Hermione finds herself grinning as she blindly follows Draco through the crowd, her heart aflutter. She wonders what his intentions are, and where he could be taking her.

As they pass by various corridors leading to unknown destinations, Hermione realises the manor is far larger than she had ever imagined. After two left turns and a staircase, he comes to a halt in front of an ornate door. "Can you guess what this is?" he asks, practically giddy.

Hermione has to hold her tongue, all too eager to guess that it's his bedroom. He grins, pushing the doors open to reveal a sight that Hermione won't soon forget.

A library.

The Malfoy Library.

She'd read about it, of course, but she quickly realises that the descriptions in her books have hardly done the space justice. Her mouth falls open as she takes in the shelves before her, realising that she is currently standing in the largest personal library in wizarding Britain. "Wow," she breathes, her head tilting backwards as she begins mentally cataloguing how many volumes must reside on these shelves.

"We have an entire alchemy section, as well as one for magical maladies," he explains, leading her through the shelves. "If we require any information for our research, I'm certain that this is an excellent place to start."

Draco watches her with a smile, waiting for her to deeply inhale as she always does when she first enters a library. Hermione nods wordlessly, fighting her urge to do just that.

"Thank you for coming this evening," he says, reaching his hand toward hers.

She accepts his outstretched hand. "Thank you for accompanying me – and for this dress."

"You look beautiful, Granger," he replies, his voice almost a whisper.

The air grows still around them as her vision narrows in on the wizard before her, her skin growing hot where his gaze lands. The energy around them is pulsating with tension, each of them hyperaware of just how little space remains between them.

Hermione tilts her head upward as she forces herself to keep her eyes locked on his. She feels as if he can see through her, and discern her every emotion, worry, and thought. This is typically something that would frighten Hermione – but as she feels a welcome warmth spread through her core, she swiftly recognises that she's comfortable with this sensation, so long as it's his silver irises that are searching.

The pair drift toward one another in a trance, neither speaking nor scarcely breathing. Both are unwilling to focus their attention anywhere other than the person before them. Their faces approach, their noses practically touching as they continue to gaze at one another. For a split second, they stay this way.

Unmoving.

Waiting.

Wondering.

Until finally, Draco lowers his lips to hers, allowing them to gently come in contact. He waits for Granger to pull back, to perhaps realise that this isn't what she wants.

And yet Hermione has always managed to surprise Draco at every turn. She deepens the kiss, allowing her lips to come crashing into his. She tosses her arms around his neck, pulling him closer, relishing in the feeling of his body pressed firmly against hers once more.

He nips at her lower lip playfully, wrapping his arms around her waist and guiding her body toward him, her core now flush against his. Her breath catches, her mind growing delirious, her entire body tingling in anticipation. She feels herself grinning with each kiss, and though her eyes are closed, she knows that Draco is smiling too.

He loves the way her body feels against his, the way her curves melt perfectly against him. He loves this beautiful dress on her. He loves that she'd worn it for him – agreed to attend with him.

Merlin, he loves this witch.

Hermione finds herself suddenly pressed against the bookshelf behind her, thousand-year-old books supporting her as she allows her head to tip back in ecstasy. Draco's lips begin to make their way down her neck, nipping at the spot just below her jaw. She releases a breathy sigh, causing him to grin against her flesh.

She shivers as he lifts her exposed leg, pulling it tightly to his side. His other hand cradles the back of her neck, his thumb drawing shapes and runes mindlessly against her skin.

"You're perfect," he whispers, peppering kisses across her jaw.

Just as Hermione allows her mind to spin, a loud bang causes her to come back into her body, Draco pulling away from her in shock. They stare at each other in astonished silence, both attempting to steady their breathing.

But, as they slowly turn their heads toward the source of the noise and see a red sparkle fall through the sky, they realise that it was a firework and nothing more.

“Sorry,” he breathes. “I thought -”

“It’s okay,” Hermione smiles, understanding completely. Even many years after the Battle of Hogwarts, she still found herself very sensitive to loud noises.

She places a quick peck on his cheek and extends her hand to him, leading them toward the glass door. Draco pushes the glass open, the chilly December air causing a shiver to cascade down Hermione’s spine. Draco wandlessly casts a warming charm over the pair, not wanting the cold to distract them from experiencing this moment to its full extent.

A New Year.

Draco wonders what this year could bring for him – for them.

He’d attended his mother’s event these past few years, but his evening has never ended notably whatsoever. Usually, he would enjoy the fireworks from his childhood bedroom in a firewhiskey-induced haze, certainly never with a curly-haired witch with her hands laced tightly around his neck.

The fireworks continue to burst and glow, various shapes illuminating the sky. Hermione stares up at the stars in awe, her cheeks flushed in more ways than one. Draco, however, can’t be bothered in the slightest to observe the fireworks display. No, his sights are elsewhere.

As they hear the guests begin to countdown from the grounds below them, both become infinitely more aware of just how close together they are standing.

Five.

Hermione’s skin tingles as she counts his every breath, and though they aren’t touching, the narrow space between them feels immense, her entire consciousness urging him to establish contact once more.

Four.

Draco is certain that he can feel the particles of his being reaching toward hers, his heartbeat racing.

Three.

Hermione allows her fingers to graze the back of his hand, eager to feel his touch. Her mind feels hazy, the moment seems to stretch infinitely before her.

Two.

Draco lightly grips her wrist, urging her to turn to face him. She turns her head with a grin, her curls flipping over her shoulder as she places her arms around his neck once more.

One.

Hermione pulls his face toward hers, allowing their lips to come crashing together. She sighs as she feels his body press against hers, still unsatisfied with their proximity. She wants to be closer, though she knows that such a feat isn't physically possible. Draco allows his hands to wander, gripping her arse and giving a gentle squeeze.

Hermione grins, nipping playfully at his bottom lip. She swears that her heart is swelling, her inhibitions growing delirious as his scent envelops her entirely. She pulls away momentarily, keeping the tip of her nose pressed against his. "Happy New Year, Draco," she smiles.

Draco shivers as the sound of his name leaves Granger's swollen lips. "Happy New Year, Hermione," he whispers.

Chapter End Notes

love you all, thank you so much for reading my little story ♡

Indulge me, Granger

Chapter Notes

Back to Hogwarts & a major Oxford flashback !!

As always, beta love to whits_end ♥ & the ever-present support of callcalypso & likelyunfinished! Please be sure to check out all of these talented authors if you haven't already.

P.s. sorry if this chapter is a little chaotic, I wrote it on my phone while on an eight-hour overnight flight! Enjoy :)

Hogwarts has always felt like home to Hermione. She yearns for its hallowed halls, the comfort of the Gryffindor common room, and the solace of the library every time she leaves the grounds. From the moment she walked through the ancient doors at the age of eleven, she felt a sense of belonging that had previously been foreign to her. No matter how many taunting insults were sent her way, Hermione felt accepted within the ancient walls of the castle. She's certain that the castle is alive, a sentient being of sorts. Why else would a building evoke such a strong feeling of acceptance?

Even now, as she walks through the corridors as a professor, Hermione smiles to herself. She can hear the stone walls humming with excitement, anxiously awaiting the return of the students who had returned home over the holidays.

Professor Granger is aware that the building is much more than a school, so it has been her goal since she first accepted her teaching position, to ensure that the castle remained a sanctuary for all who call it home.

She made certain that every student knew they could come to her with any concerns, big or small. She's just as happy to help a student overcome a breakup as she is with the loss of a family member. Professor Granger's office has seen many tears, and many smiles, but she wouldn't have it any other way.

When the students filter in, eager to dig into their evening feast, Hermione takes special care to inspect all of their faces. Christmas can be a joyous time for many, but the opposite can be true for those whose circumstances do not permit such celebrations. While some students are eager to return to their family's home, anticipating many gifts and laughter, others dread the occasion. Perhaps their families are down on their luck, or their parents aren't as accepting as one would hope. Regardless of the reason, Hermione is determined to discern if any of her students had had a less-than-desirable holiday break.

Scanning the sea of boisterous children at the Gryffindor table, she notices a student who looks nothing short of disappointed. Robbie Alcott, the first-year muggleborn student, is always smiling. He's become quite the class clown over the past few months, always making it his goal to make all those around him laugh.

But as Robbie sits and picks at his roast, he appears to be a different student entirely. His face is crestfallen, his shoulders hunched over. While his peers holler and discuss their holidays, Robbie looks as if he's attempting to render himself invisible through sheer will.

Hermione's heart skips a beat as she remembers Robbie's family circumstances. He is the youngest of five children and a scholarship student. His parents had been worried upon learning of his acceptance to Hogwarts, concerned that they wouldn't be able to afford to send their son to the magical school.

And so, as the students file out of the Great Hall, Hermione makes a beeline for the young wizard. She crouches down and offers him a kind smile. "Mister Alcott, would you accompany me to my office?" she asks.

He looks worried at first, no doubt trying to decipher what he'd gotten in trouble for during his short period of time back at the school.

"You aren't in trouble," she assures him. She watches Robbie deflate in relief as he packs up his belongings and silently follows her from the hall.

Once they arrive at her office, she flicks her wand toward the kettle, bringing the water to an immediate boil. "Tea?" she asks with a smile.

"Please," he smiles, taking a seat in the plush chair on the other side of her desk.

After preparing his tea, Hermione summons an object from her storage closet before taking a seat. "How were your holidays?" she asks with a kind smile.

"They were alright," the boy replies, avoiding her gaze.

"I'm sure it was lovely to see your family," she adds. The boy only nods.

"I wanted to give you something Mister Alcott if that's alright with you?" she asks.

The boy perks up, a confused expression on his face. Robbie certainly hadn't received any presents over the holidays other than a single chocolate bar. Over the years, he'd come to expect this. His parents always did their best, but even at his young age, he was very aware that his family is not as fortunate as others. He understands and attempts to accept his circumstances, but on days like today, such a feat is immensely difficult.

All of his housemates had been happily recounting tales of their holidays, grinning as they list the various gifts they had received. Many of the boys had been given brooms and started planning their practice sessions that summer, eager to try out for the Quidditch team the following year.

Others had received gobstones or chess sets, a new familiar or a potions kit. Robbie had focused all his energy on not becoming jealous, reminding himself over and over that his parents had done their best. Besides, he felt guilty about the fact that he got to live in a magical castle, consuming feasts every night while his siblings did not have such luxuries.

And so, when Professor Granger slides a blue book across the desk toward him, he grins. "For me?" he asks, reading the title: *THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD*.

“Yes,” Hermione smiles. “You’re familiar with fairy tales such as Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood, yes?”

Robbie nods. He practically knows them by heart – his older siblings had read these tales to him almost every evening.

“Well, these are wizarding fairy tales,” Hermione explains. “I wasn’t familiar with them at your age either, seeing as I was also raised by muggles. But I thought it might be nice for you to be able to read them.”

Hermione remembers quite well how shocking these tales had been, especially when compared with the muggle tales she was familiar with. The copy Professor Dumbledore had gifted her remains locked away with her private belongings, the artifact containing far too many memories both positive and negative for her to part with it.

Robbie feels his eyes start to well up, incredibly moved by such a gesture. “Thank you,” he smiles, a single tear escaping and trickling down his flushed cheeks.

“Of course,” she smiles. “Can I read you one?”

Robbie nods once more, sitting back in the armchair with a smile.

“A long time ago, in a land far away, there was a kingdom ruled by a foolish King who decided that he should be the only one to have magical powers. He formed an army, which he called the Brigade of Witch-Hunters, and armed them with black hounds. At the same time, he wanted an instructor in Magic, so he made calls for a wizard or witch from one of the nearby villages to teach him. Of course, nobody dared to volunteer, except for a cunning charlatan who had no magical powers. He convinced the foolish King that he would be able to teach him by performing a few simple tricks. He was then appointed as the Grand Sorcerer in Chief, the King's Private Magic Master.”

After attempting to prepare for his lessons for the upcoming week to no avail, Draco decides that his time would be much better spent pestering his favourite Charms professor. He weaves through the halls, smiling at all his favourite portraits as he goes. Many are shocked at such a display, for Draco has never been one to offer something as inconsequential as a portrait of a smile. But Draco’s life has taken quite the turn as of late, and as such, he can’t help but grin.

“Hello Sir Cadogan,” he greets the knight.

“Ah! Professor, come thee for a quest?” the knight asks, sticking out his sword in a motion that Draco assumes is meant to be threatening.

“I’m headed to the charms corridor,” Draco replies, unsure why he feels the need to share this with the knight.

“Is there a beast that needs slaying? A maiden that needs saving?” Cadogan shouts.

“No, no, just a normal visit,” Draco replies.

“A visit with whom?” the knight demands.

“Professor Granger,” Draco whispers.

“Aha! A maiden in distress!” the knight shouts, beginning to jog on the spot.

“She isn’t in distress. I just want to pay her a visit,” Draco replies quickly. The knight deflates, clearly disappointed by the fact that no one in the castle is currently in mortal peril.

“I bid you farewell.” The knight bows, taking off into the neighbouring portraits.

Draco continues through the corridors, reprimanding a group of Hufflepuffs who are very clearly stoned, and offering a small wave to Elizabeth and Beatrice.

He arrives in the charms corridor and takes a moment to fix his appearance. He smooths his already pristinely pressed robes and ruffles his hair so that it’s perfectly imperfect. Taking a deep breath, he approaches Hermione’s office, knowing that she is without a doubt lesson planning or otherwise occupying herself.

But, just as his hand comes into contact with the wooden door, he pauses. A voice can be heard from the other side, reading a story that he is very familiar with.

He waits for the story to come to an end, quite enjoying listening to Hermione’s voice spin the tale of the hopping pot. She has the perfect voice for a professor, he thinks. She reads with just enough emotion while her intonation and pacing weave the words together, bringing the story to life before your very eyes.

Draco wonders if perhaps he can convince the witch to read to him every now and then, rather enjoying the way her words evoke a sense of calmness.

He knocks, slowly pushing the door open. There at her desk sits a small Gryffindor boy, eyes wide as he stares at the professor adoringly.

“Oh! Hello Professor Malfoy,” she greets him, her cheeks filling with color. The pair hadn’t seen one another since New Year’s Eve, the events of the evening still fresh in both of their minds.

“Professor Granger,” he nods. “Mister Alcott.”

“Hello Sir,” the young wizard smiles.

“Learning of the Tales of the Beedle and the Bard, are we?” he asks, sauntering toward Hermione’s desk.

“Yes, they’re quite peculiar,” Alcott replies.

“No more than muggle fairy tales,” Draco replies, remembering the horror that had been reading the original tale of the Little Mermaid. The story had shocked him, not only because of the gory content that was supposedly intended for children, but the inaccuracies of the tale as well. The author has clearly never met a mermaid in his life, their descriptions wholly inaccurate.

“I suppose so,” the Gryffindor nods. “This was nothing like a Disney movie.”

Draco nods, agreeing with him wholeheartedly. He stands there awkwardly, realising that he wouldn’t be able to enact his grand plan until Granger finishes up with her student.

“Well Mister Alcott, this is yours to keep,” she smiles, tapping the blue cover of the book, her mind reaching a similar conclusion.

“Thank you, Professor,” the boy beams.

“Happy Christmas,” Hermione smiles.

Once the boy is out of earshot, Draco turns to the witch with a questioning expression. “Robbie is a scholarship student,” she explains.

Draco nods, wondering if perhaps the scholarship fund covers a copy of this book for all the muggleborn students. “I see.”

“He seemed quite crestfallen at dinner,” she continues. “I don’t believe that he received any presents for Christmas.”

Draco’s eyes go wide, understanding the situation much better now. He can hardly imagine a childhood Christmas without any gifts. His Christmases as a child had been filled with new brooms, new robes, holidays to France, chess sets, and whatever else he asked for. He feels momentarily embarrassed by the fact that he’d let his experience cloud his judgement once more. He often wishes that he was more like Granger, who is able to see beyond her own experience with the world, her perspective far more multifaceted than his.

“That was very kind of you,” he replies.

“You know Robbie, he’s always smiling. When I saw him at dinner, I knew something was off. It broke my heart to see him like that.”

“They’re lucky to have you, Granger,” he smiles.

“I should start purchasing gifts for all the scholarship children. I haven’t a clue what to get them all...” she begins to ramble.

Draco feels his heart swell as he listens to the witch, once again taking a moment to appreciate just how thoughtful she is. He continues to be bewildered by Hermione and her selflessness. Not only did she single-handedly arrange for the entire Muggleborn Integration Program, but she has deemed herself personally responsible for each and every one of these students. Now, she apparently feels it necessary to purchase gifts for all the scholarship students as well.

Although, Draco supposes that this would be an excellent use of the funds. He’d been wondering what his yearly donation had been used for and Christmas gifts seem to be as good of a use as any.

“Granger,” he smiles, causing her ramblings to cease. “I think the students would be appreciative of any gift you see fit.”

“I suppose so,” she nods.

“Besides, now you have twelve months to plan for next year,” he adds, attempting to reassure the witch.

“You’re right. Yes of course,” she agrees, allowing her shoulders to deflate. Hermione has quite the nasty habit of becoming stressed about things far beyond the point where she should.

“Anyway, sorry, you didn’t come here to listen to me go off on a tangent,” she smiles sheepishly.

“I’m always happy to listen to you ramble, Granger,” Draco grins. Hermione feels her heart skip a beat, deciding that this comment is quite possibly one of the kindest things anyone has ever said to her.

Neither Hermione nor Draco seem to know how they should act at this moment. Of course, the last time they’d seen one another had been as Hermione had stepped through the Floo at Malfoy Manor, cheeks flushed and heart soaring. Now, however, they’re back at their place of work, back to reality.

Draco worries that perhaps their kiss had been a product of circumstances and nothing more. It had been New Year’s Eve after all, an evening when people engage in acts that they wouldn’t otherwise. But, despite the small voice in the back of his mind reminding him of this fact, he chooses to remain positive.

“I figured I should stop by and see when you wanted to start our research,” he replies, shifting awkwardly from one foot to another. He curses himself for how he continues to act in her presence. Draco has always maintained a suave demeanour around witches – a devil-may-care attitude if you will. But Granger always renders him incoherent, transporting himself back into the mind of a pubescent teenage boy once more.

“Oh!” She exclaims, casting a quick tempus charm. “This evening?” She asks optimistically. She’s quite eager to begin scouring the preliminary data that Dr. Pyrites had sent to her via owl. But she’s possibly even more eager to spend time with Draco.

Draco nods, “the Room of Requirement?”

“Yes, let me just gather all my things,” she smiles, bustling around her office.

Draco leans back against the stone wall, enjoying the chaotic fashion that Hermione moves through the space. She stacks parchment into orderly piles, wordlessly summoning her beaded bag. When she turns to face him, her hair is slightly frazzled. As she notices Draco’s playful grin, insecurity slips up her spine. “What?” She demands.

“Oh nothing, Granger,” he replies, raising his eyebrows in unison.

“Why are you looking at me like that then?”

Draco’s mind whirs, debating how he wishes to answer her question. On one hand, he could answer honestly and tell her he finds her chaos to be beautiful — that he’d missed having this kind of relationship with her — being able to witness her hectic nature that she often hides from others.

Or, the safer route, which involves much less brutal honesty, could be making a joke out of the situation. In the end, he compromises with himself. “It’s just nice to see you, Granger, is that a crime?”

She blushes at this. “I suppose not,” she replies.

The pair walk side by side through the corridors, arriving at the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. “An alchemy lab?” He asks, receiving a nod in return.

A door quickly forms, and as they enter the space, Hermione feels her breath hitch. The Room of Requirement had opted to take on the form of a nearly exact replica of the Oxford Alchemy Lab. Draco has a similar expression to Hermione, though slightly less surprised. He'd expected something similar, but at the last second, his mind had wandered to their time together in Oxford, a fact that the Room had evidently taken note of.

Hermione sets to work at once, spreading various sheets of parchment containing Dr. Pyrites slanted scrawl and intricate diagrams across the table.

"You mentioned an Egyptian Alchemical ritual?" Draco asks, approaching the now-covered table. He focuses all his mental energy on remaining present, not wanting his thoughts to wander to past *encounters* in the lab. He wonders if the room is having a similar effect on Hermione.

"Yes, after I met with your mother for tea, I started researching immediately to prepare for New Year's," she replies.

Draco's eyes widen. "I hadn't realised that you had gone for tea with my mother," he admits.

"Oh, yes, er, she invited me," Hermione replied.

Groaning internally at the news, his mother's meddling didn't surprise him in the slightest. His mind momentarily points out that this meeting with the Dr could have been why Hermione had opted to attend the Ball. Perhaps she hadn't cared to dance with him at all.

Either way, Draco is determined to not let such wonderings take hold of his consciousness anymore, so he quickly disregards this thought.

"The ritual is based on their observations of the lunar cycle, as well as the astrological patterns," she explains, casting a diagram in the air before her. It reminds Draco of a "hologram" he had seen in a movie that Theo had forced him to watch that summer.

"This is a replica of a chart I found in the ministry archives," she continues, flicking her wand so that the diagram spins slowly on its axis. "The Egyptians believed the lunar phase had an impact on the outcome of alchemical rituals, most notably the act of transmutation."

Draco nods, moving closer to the diagram. "May I?" He asks, awaiting her permission. He'd learned his lesson when it comes to interfering with Hermione's work.

December 15, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

"Malfoy!" Hermione exclaims. "What on earth are you doing?"

"Preparing the salt," he replies, holding both his hands up in surrender.

"Why are you doing it like that?" She demands, her face aghast.

"Like what?"

"It needs to be left untouched!"

"Granger, I'm wearing gloves."

“I just think we should leave it. We shouldn’t move the vials until the last possible moment.”

Draco sighs, deciding that this disagreement isn’t worth the battle in the slightest. Over the past few months, he’d learned quite quickly that Granger has her way of doing things, and is completely unwilling to change her methods in any way, shape, or form.

He too has his preferred methods, but his flexibility seems to be far more intact than Granger’s. “Alright Granger,” he replies, putting the salt back in its original position. “What would you like me to do then?”

“Can you check the potion?” She asks.

“I already did,” he replies, growing impatient. He isn’t sure why Granger doesn’t seem to trust him to complete even the most mundane of tasks. He’d been proving himself the entire first term, always arriving at the lab prepared and eager to work. But, for some reason, Granger didn’t seem to be able to just let him work on his own just yet. She constantly hovers behind him when he stirs the potion or observes him out of the corner of her eye as he chops ingredients.

“Do you not trust me?” He asks suddenly.

Her eyes grow wide at this, her mouth hanging open as if attempting to summon an excuse for her actions. “No, that’s not it Malfoy,” she replies. “I’m just not used to working with others.”

“Well, it’s a great time to start then, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so. Sorry,” she apologises.

“I don’t know if you recall Granger, but I was only ever a few short grade points behind you.”

“Yes, again, it’s not you Malfoy. I’m just used to doing group work by myself. I may have some control issues,” she admits.

“Just know that I am capable of working without supervision,” he smiles, attempting to lighten the mood. He knows the witch hadn’t had malicious intent.

January 7th, 2007, The Room of Requirement, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

“Why don’t I take a look at the Wolfsbane potion trials?” Draco suggests.

“Okay, yes, good idea,” Hermione nods, her eyes locked on the diagram before her.

Draco smiles to himself, quite happy about the fact that the witch trusts him enough to assign him this task. By the end of their time at Oxford, they’d reached a sort of understanding, one that made use of both their talents.

While Hermione would ponder the theoretical aspects of experimentation, forming hypotheses and connections, Draco would stick to the tangible evidence. His realm of expertise is, of course, potions, and over time, he’d discovered that he possesses quite the knack for analysing data. During their preliminary trials for Dragon Fever, Granger had conducted all the research, administering the ritual while Draco would track the data points and reactions, diligently noting all of his findings in their shared journal.

“From my first look, it looks like the moonstone was the missing ingredient during the first round of trials. I’m eager to see if you reach the same conclusion,” the witch smiles, expanding the diagram and focusing specifically on the Lupus constellation.

“Are you hypothesising that the treatment for lycanthropy will be a combination of a ritual and a potion?” He asks, taking note of various passages that she highlighted.

“Yes,” she nods, thrilled that Draco is able to keep up with her train of thought with ease. That’s one of the main reasons she likes researching with the wizard — she doesn’t need to hold his hand throughout the process.

“The Wolfsbane potion, while effective, only treats the symptoms, not the root cause of the symptoms,” she explains.

“Ah, so you believe that the combination of the potion and a lunar ritual will be able to discern the root cause?”

“Perhaps. Though I’m uncertain if it will be the same potion as wolfsbane. I’m worried that the potency of the aconite, combined with the ritual, will be too aggressive of a treatment, do you agree?”

Draco ponders this for a moment, “what if we change the ratios of the Valerian Root and Lavender?” he asks.

“That could work,” she nods. “That would certainly counteract the negative impacts of aconite.”

The pair work in comfortable silence for the better part of three hours, Draco analysing the trial data, and Hermione taking notes as she inspects her lunar diagram.

“Oh!” She exclaims suddenly. “It’s got quite late.”

Draco looks up, his mind returning to his body as he checks his watch. “So it has,” he drawls. If he’s being honest, he really doesn’t want to leave the Room of Requirement and enter the real world once more. He enjoys working in silence in Granger’s presence, finding her quirks to be calming. The witch constantly sucks on the end of her quills as she works, an act that drives Draco absolutely barmy. When she’s deep in thought, she’ll often hum little tunes to herself, something that Draco had come to look forward to, rather than consider a nuisance as he once had. It makes him happy when he can identify the song, and though he always fights the urge to hum along with her, he’s certain that one day he will.

“Should we call it a night?” the witch asks, organising her various piles of parchment once more.

“I suppose so,” Draco replies. “Fancy a trip to the kitchens?”

Hermione grins, “of course.”

“Oh! Hellos Professor Grangers and Malfoys!” Gimby exclaims, rushing forward toward the pair.

“Hello Gimby, sorry to bother you at this hour,” Hermione apologises.

“Its is no troubles Miss!” the tiny elf beams.

“Would we be able to have some hot chocolate?” Draco asks politely.

“Yes! Right away sir!” Gimby grins, skipping away toward the miniature stove.

“You and your hot chocolate,” Hermione laughs, turning to face the wizard. She’d been wondering how their relationship would change once they returned to Hogwarts. It’s easy to become caught up in a whirlwind of possibilities on an evening like New Year’s Eve, but if she’s being honest with herself, the kiss had been the result of many weeks’ worth of tension, and hardly a spur-of-the-moment decision.

She’d returned home to Potter Manor positively giddy, immediately divulging the details of her evening to a very attentive Ginny. The witch had been beside herself, kicking her feet and giggling as Hermione recounted the procession of her New Year’s Eve.

“Against a bookshelf Mione? That must have been a wet dream of yours since forever!” the witch had exclaimed.

After shushing the over-eager witch and casting a silencing charm so as to not wake her children, Hermione had grinned, confirming Ginny’s suspicions.

“Why are you here?” Ginny had demanded, gesturing to Hermione’s guest bed.

“As opposed to in Draco’s bed?” Hermione asked, eyebrow raised.

“Yes! You need a good shag, Mione,” Ginny exclaimed.

“I don’t want to rush things,” Hermione admitted. “It’s still all so new. It’s going to take a while to get back to where we once were.”

“Why?” Ginny asked, confused.

“Because I don’t want to be hurt again Gin, you remember how inconsolable I was. I just want to be certain that this is the right move for both of us.”

Now, however, as she sips her hot chocolate, her eyes peeking over the mug toward a smiling Draco, Hermione wishes she wasn’t so practical about everything. It would be nice to toss caution to the wind, wouldn’t it?

But she’s determined to stick to her plan: *take things slow*.

As they exit the kitchen, Hermione turns to say a goodbye – the Charms corridor in the opposite direction of the dungeons. But, as she pivots her body, Draco does the same, the pair colliding with one another. Hermione’s scalding hot chocolate spills all over her white blouse, rendering it essentially translucent.

“Oh!” Draco exclaims, seemingly unable to tear his eyes away from her chest.

Hermione casts a hasty scourgify and evanesco in tandem, her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. “Sorry about that,” she replies, avoiding his gaze.

“No, that was my fault. I’m sorry,” Draco stammers. “I just wanted to walk you back to your rooms,” he admits sheepishly.

“Oh, you don’t have to do that,” she begins, her stream of words coming to a sudden halt when she feels his hand slip into hers.

“Indulge me, Granger,” he smiles. Hermione relents. Who is she to say no to such a request?

December 7, 2000, King Street, Oxford

After fifteen months of spending the vast majority of their time in each other’s presence, the inevitable had finally come to pass. Hermione lays awake next to Draco, a smile plastered on her face. She could hardly believe that the previous evening had occurred – in fact, she’s certain that if he wasn’t lying in the bed next to her at this very moment, she would have thought it to be a dream.

The tension between the two had been palpable for months now, neither of them willing to make the first step toward initiating anything. They’d been orbiting one another in perfect synchronicity, never coming to meet. Finally, *finally*, their paths had crossed, both of them tossing caution and self-preservation into the abyss.

Hermione tries to reign in her train of thought, not wanting it to wander too far off course. They had yet to discuss what the prior evening’s occurrences meant. She reminds herself that Draco could very well have just wanted a shag and nothing else. She doesn’t want to get her hopes up, assuming that he would want her in more ways than one.

Hermione had been envisioning herself with Draco for weeks, and had become rather infatuated with the idea of it all. She’d found an equal in Draco, someone who is able to challenge her just as much as he supports her. He is her perfect opposite, a person who somehow possesses the qualities that complement hers as if they’d always been intended to work in tandem.

She hadn’t seen this coming, that much is certain. But now that she’s allowed herself to consider a future that Draco is a part of, she realises she should have foreseen the inevitability of their *relationship*.

“Hello,” she whispers as she notices him stir to life. His eyes go wide as he comes to his senses, no doubt surprised to be waking up in her bed.

“Morning Granger,” he replies, his voice breathier and raspier than normal. Hermione wonders if she could convince the wizard to sleep over much more frequently, quite enjoying the sound of his morning voice.

“Did you want coffee?” she asks, propping her head up on her arm so that she can lie comfortably while she faces him.

“Yes please,” Draco smiles, making no moves to remove the duvet.

With a grin, Hermione removes herself from the warmth of the covers and makes her way toward her small kitchenette. Draco’s breath catches the second he realises the witch is wearing an oversized University of Oxford t-shirt and nothing else. He finds that he’s suddenly wide awake as he watches her stand on her tippy toes, reaching into her cupboards for two mugs. Her t-shirt creeps up ever so slightly, exposing a small portion of her arse.

Draco has to hold back a groan at the sight. He can hardly believe that it finally happened. He feels giddy with excitement, wishing that he could go back in time and tell his younger self what had transpired.

He'd slept with Hermione Granger.

Grey eyes remain transfixed as he observes Granger moving about the kitchen, grinding fresh coffee beans and preparing her french press. He's always found the witch to be exceptionally attractive, but seeing her like this – her cheeks flushed and expression groggy, her hair tousled and arse bare – he feels delirious. In that moment, determination rises in his chest. His goal: to wake up next to Granger as many mornings as possible.

After their mugs have emptied, Draco turns to face the witch with a devilish grin. "Is there a reason you don't have any knickers on, Granger?"

Hermione feels her cheeks flush, already feeling her arousal growing with every second that Draco's gaze remains aimed in her direction. Emboldened, she whispers, "figured you'd enjoy that."

Draco lets out a groan from somewhere in the back of his throat. Leaning toward her with fire in his eyes. "You would be correct, Granger," he grins, placing delicate kisses on her neck. "You don't have any plans today, do you?"

"No, I -" Hermione begins to reply.

"Good," he whispers, his voice muffled against her skin. He taps a single finger on her shirt, causing it to disappear into thin air.

"Malfoy!" she exclaims.

Draco chooses to ignore her comment, continuing to nip at her neck, making his way down her chest. Her mind becomes hazy as he brushes his thumb over her nipple before taking it in his mouth, pulling at it slightly with his teeth and breathing in, a cold sensation sweeping over her as she keens.

Hermione tosses her head back, her curls falling loosely behind her as she arches her back – ecstasy overriding her other senses. With her breasts fully on display, Draco leans forward and continues peppering kisses down her chest. "Merlin, these tits," he mumbles.

Draco can feel his mind spin, overjoyed at the fact that he is currently enjoying a very naked Hermione. He'd dreamed of such an occurrence for months now, fantasising about all the ways that he planned to worship every single inch of her body.

"You're perfect," he whispers into her mouth. She can feel his smile on her lips as he slowly drags his fingers down her abdomen – her skin growing hot wherever his fingers come into contact.

As he smiles down at her, her cheeks flush, her mind hazy with anticipation. Breathy moans escape her lips as Draco trails his fingers between her thighs, teasing her as he drags a single finger between her slit.

A ragged breath escapes him as the evidence of her arousal meets his fingers. They move toward her clit as he begins circling a singular digit, slowly at first, varying the pressure and speed until a

moan is pulled from Hermione's throat. Her verbal response causes his already aching length to twitch in anticipation, but he disregards it, for the time being, determined to bring Hermione to the point of release at least once before even considering himself.

He continues to lick and nip at her neck with fervent need, paying close attention to the space just below her jaw. "Fuck, Malfoy," she breathes, her head tilted back.

He lowers himself toward the end of the bed, licking her torso as he does. He takes in her glistening folds as he situates himself between her thigh and pulls back momentarily with a devilish grin on his face, an eyebrow raised – a silent request.

"Please," she gasps, her hand delving into his hair.

Without waiting for a second longer, he wraps his arms around her, grabbing her arse and pulling her toward him. Rather than devouring her with the frenzied need he wants to, Draco decides to take it slowly at first. He begins with long, leisurely licks, flicking his tongue as he reaches her clit. She begins to squirm as she plays with her tits. Her head falls back as his tongue concentrates on her bundle of nerves, a gasp slipping out of her mouth.

He slides his hand down her leg toward him, hoisting it up over his shoulder, pulling her even closer to him. He repeats this action with the other leg, leaving his head firmly wedged between her thighs – his new favourite place to be. Half-crazed by lust, he grips her arse, holding her upwards so that her cunt is angled toward him. Hermione mumbles incoherently, a jolt of satisfaction sending itself to Draco's throbbing rigidity as she grinds herself against his tongue with need, her eyes closed tightly, thighs shaking – desperate for release.

"Gods, you're heavenly," he moans against her sex, his warm breath causing her to squirm in anticipation. Determined to see her come undone, he slides two fingers up her slit, teasing her slightly as his tongue continues to lick at her clit. He inserts his fingers at the same moment that he bites lightly at the bundle of nerves, pulling in a breath of air as he does.

The witch releases a pleasure-filled moan, her voice both breathy and higher pitched than usual. "*Oh, fuck, Malfoy.*"

Draco begins to pump his fingers in and out of her at a rhythmic pace, grinning to himself as he feels her walls clench. "Such a good girl, Granger," he whispers, his words muffled against her sex.

A soft whimper escapes her lips as she grips Draco's hair, her chest heaving as she swears under her breath, a symphony of "*Fuck, yes, don't stop, I'm going to, fuck, yes, Malfoy.*"

Draco smiles as she writhes beneath him, releasing a high-pitched shriek. Draco allows her to ride out her first orgasm, one he hopes is the first of many today, enjoying nothing more than the feeling of her dripping sex on his mouth.

"Shall we go for breakfast?" he asks, grinning as he observes the panting witch beneath him.

"You're incorrigible," she giggles, pulling his face toward hers for a kiss.

"Or we could order in? That way I can stay right here," he explains.

"Okay, but only if you make the call," she grins.

“Deal,” Draco nods, eagerly summoning his cell phone.

Draco decides at that moment that he would die a happy man if he reached his demise while lying comfortably between Hermione’s thighs.

January 7th, 2007, The Dungeons, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

As Draco weaves his way through the dungeons, he attempts to wipe the ever-present smirk off of his face. He’d been struggling as of late, to remain cool calm and collected in Hermione’s presence. Something about their renewed *relationship* – or whatever you may call it – had been rendering him particularly reminiscent of their prior *encounters* .

But, as he lies awake that evening, staring at the stone ceiling above him he realizes an undeniable truth. Draco’s preferred place of death remains the same as it had been all those years ago.

He only hopes that perhaps Granger will allow him this pleasure once more.

Potions & Possession

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome back! Sorry for the delay, I was travelling the past few days and life was very hectic. If you haven't checked it out already, I posted my Dramione / NottPott Christmas fic inspired by "The Holiday" (2006) on Friday!

I hope you enjoy this fluffy chapter that includes a major flashback to Oxford! As always, I am so thankful for each and every one of you reading this fic, it means the world to me.

A huge thank you to likelyunfinished and callcalypso for reading this chapter & providing feedback ♡

This chapter is dedicated to CatherineJuliet whose comments bring me such joy, thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Beatrice Murphy has been excelling thus far in all of her courses – save for flying – but, potions had quickly become her absolute favourite subject. She likes its logical nature and the way her potions textbook reminds her of her mother's pale yellow recipe book.

Beatrice had spent countless hours of her childhood sitting atop the kitchen counter with her legs dangling off the edge, eagerly watching her mother bake cakes, pies, cupcakes, and cookies. Bea's mom had learned from her mom, who had learned from hers, spanning back more generations than the young witch can even begin to fathom.

And so, when she was old enough, her dad made her a wooden step stool so that she could reach the counter, joining in on a tradition passed down maternally all the way to her. She remembers feeling extremely proud to use the wooden spoon that has been her grandmother's, mixing away at whatever bowl her mother put in front of her.

But it was never just baking that kept Bea enthralled, it was the learning. Learning math through pounds, ounces, and pints. Learning about science through the reactions that one ingredient has on all of the others, especially when the heat of the oven was brought into the equation. Learning English, spelling and writing through the beautifully written recipe cards in her grandmother's elegant cursive.

Bea was always happiest in her mother's kitchen, basking in the joy radiating off of her mother, scents of sugar, vanilla, lemon, and cinnamon wafting towards her nose.

It had been comforting when she'd begun her potion's lessons – the logical steps bringing with them a warm sense of familiarity. She found peace in meticulously preparing the ingredients, checking the instructions with a side eye every few stirs.

But, with time, she'd become familiar with all of the potions in her first-year textbook, the challenge of the act no longer as stimulating as it once was. So, after she shovels her last bite of

dinner into her mouth one evening, she speeds out of the Great Hall toward the dungeons with a look of determination on her face.

She may only be twelve years old, but Bea knows exactly what her future as a witch looks like – a potioneer. And the logical first step to achieving such a career? Mastering all of the potions taught from first to the seventh year.

“Hullo, Professor,” Bea grins sheepishly.

“Hello, Miss Murphy,” Professor Malfoy replies. “How may I help you?”

“I was wondering if I might do some extra credit for potions,” she replies, averting her gaze, evidently nervous about her request.

“Miss Murphy, you have the highest potions grades in your year, you hardly need extra credit,” he smiles.

“I know, but I want to learn more. No offence, sir, but I find everything quite easy,” the witch replies, this time attempting to make eye contact with the professor.

“Oh?” he grins. “How about Wednesday evenings?”

“Yes!” she exclaims, her mind already reeling at the possibilities.

“We will not only brew potions but prepare ingredients as well,” he adds.

“Yes! I want to get a head start on the second and third-year ingredients lists,” she grins, practically vibrating in excitement.

“Very well, please join me after dinner each Wednesday. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The next day, Beatrice can hardly contain her excitement. She passes through the motions of her day in a trance, giddy at the prospect of her extra potions lessons.

The door is ajar when she arrives, and after pushing it open, she grins. On the centre table, the one Professor Malfoy uses for demonstrations, is a large cauldron and various vials containing liquids of assorted colours. “Hello, Miss Murphy,” he welcomes her, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

“Hello, Professor,” she smiles. “What are we doing today?”

“Well Miss Murphy, you will be extracting flobberworm mucus,” he replies stoically. Secretly, he’d chosen this task to see how the young witch would react. He has a sneaking suspicion that she’ll be excited, rather than disgusted by the task.

“Okay!” she replies, eagerly moving towards the table.

“The slimy green mucus is exuded from the Flobberworm and is often used to thicken potions,” Professor Malfoy explains. “It is a very popular potion ingredient, though much more cost-effective to extract for yourself.”

Bea nods, following along, clinging to the Potion Master's every word. "It is used in the Wiggenweld Potion, the Herbicide Potion, and the Sleeping Draught," she adds with a smile.

"Quite right," the professor nods, impressed.

Professor Malfoy has never thought of himself as someone who is fond of children. Given the nature of his career, he tolerates and respects them, but he never thought he would grow to enjoy their presence.

His NEWT students are one thing, practically adults capable of some semblance of maturity. The younger years, however, had proven to be more of a challenge for Draco thus far. This is likely due in part to his own childhood and how prattish he'd been, but more so that he hasn't a clue how to connect with the younger students.

That is until Beatrice came along.

He realized quite quickly that something about the muggleborn Gryffindor is oddly familiar. So, when Bea had come knocking, he'd been more than happy to oblige with her request. Now, however, he realizes that this familiarity he'd been sensing had been the young girl's unrelenting urge to learn – a reminder of another Muggleborn witch he'd borne witness to during his own time as a Hogwarts student.

It makes him happy to know that he has a chance to have a positive impact this time around. There would be no senseless insults sent her way or an air of superiority about him. He would support this witch and encourage her throughout her career at Hogwarts.

Draco situates himself at his desk with a stack of student essays, quite content to finish his marking whilst the witch extracts the flobberworm mucus. As he flips through the pieces of parchment, his mind begins to wander, thinking back to the past few days with Granger. He can't help but wonder how their relationship will continue to progress.

Draco has had to bite his tongue on multiple occasions to stop himself from asking Granger to be his girlfriend, officially. He doesn't want to rush things, this much is certain. But every now and then, when Granger stares up at him with her sparkling golden eyes and a grin, her honey-brown curls framing her face, his heart attempts to override his better judgment.

Draco has always had a possessive sort of nature, he supposes it's due in part to his namesake – the dragon constellation in the far northern sky. Dragons are fierce protectors of things that they care for, the first Triwizard task in his fourth year a perfect example of such a phenomenon. He knows that Granger doesn't need protection, but the feelings he harbours for the witch are not of this nature. He's proud to be associated with her, to be someone that the wizarding world's Golden Girl deems worthy of her time and affection. It makes him want to be the best version of himself, someone that he's proud to show up as to Hermione time and time again.

He wouldn't say that these feelings are ones of possession, because that isn't the sort of relationship he'd ever envisioned for himself. In fact, Draco is almost certain that he would much prefer to be possessed by Granger, rather than the other way around.

But, he's determined to remain patient, to allow Hermione to set the pace. The last thing he wants to do is rush her, or make her feel uncomfortable. But, it's becoming increasingly more difficult to fight against his desires to be something that Granger possesses once more.

A concerned “Sir?” brings him back down to reality, Beatrice staring in his direction. “Sir, you’ve been staring at that wall for a few minutes now. Are you alright?” the witch asks.

“Yes, Miss Murphy, I am fine,” he replies quickly.

“Sir?” she asks again.

He looks up in reply.

“Do you think we could practice making the calming draught?” she asks.

“Why the calming draught?” he asks, his curiosity getting the best of him.

“I just think it’s a useful potion to know how to brew,” the witch replies simply.

“And what do you know of the draught?” Professor Malfoy asks, standing to approach the witch.

“A Calming Draught is a potion that is used to calm a person down after they have suffered a shock, trauma, or emotional outburst. It is blue in colour when brewed correctly. It contains many ingredients, but most notably lavender, crocodile heart and peppermint. Adding too much peppermint oil, however, could give the drinker a burning sensation in their mouth and cause watery eyes or uncontrollable sobbing.”

Draco nods, impressed by the witch’s alarming accuracy. “I see you’ve read ahead to sixth-year potions, Miss Murphy,” he smiles.

“Yes,” she grins.

Just outside of the Potions classroom, is a witch with a flushed face. Professor Granger had already finished all of her marking for the week a few hours prior and had decided that a trip to the dungeons was in order. She’d stopped first in the kitchens, fetching two mugs of hot cocoa and placing them under a stasis charm. But, as she approached the regularly empty classroom, she heard voices.

“Yes Miss Murphy, I am fine.”

She’d shivered, leaning closer to the door and pressing her ear against the wood. Hearing Malfoy interacts with Bea causes an overwhelming sensation to sweep over her, one she had been feeling at an increasingly frequent rate as of late.

She enjoys listening to him speak, though she has to admit that she much prefers when she can see him whilst the morphemes escape his lips. She’s always found the Slytherin to have an exceptionally attractive voice. His tone and intonation send shivers down her spine, each syllable flowing through her mind like a stream.

She has a memory of one instance in particular when Draco had lowered his voice to an almost whisper in the library in her fourth year. “Fancy seeing you here, Granger,” he smirked, his consonants reaching her ears as if through an echo. His voice had joined her in her dreams many times since then, oftentimes uttering various phrases that she would never admit during the light of day.

As he'd gotten older, however, his voice had become even more delectable. Before, she'd been able to block his posh intonation from her mind, opting to ignore it entirely. Now, however, this act had become almost impossible.

Finally, after waiting at the door for such a length of time that Hermione deems it borderline creepy, she places a light knock on the door.

The door swings open immediately, revealing Draco and Beatrice perched on two stools, staring in her direction.

"Oh! Hello, Miss Muphy!" Hermione declares, attempting to act surprised. She hastens towards the table, silently placing a mug in front of Draco.

"Hello, Professor Granger," he nods, trying to steady his breathing.

"That's a lot of flobberworm mucus, Miss Murphy," Hermione observes. *Suave, Hermione*, she scolds herself internally.

"Yes, Professor Malfoy is giving me extra potions lessons," she beams.

"Oh?" Hermione asks, tilting her head to the left and smiling in his direction. She feels her heart flutter at this news, finding it positively adorable that Draco would offer such a thing.

"How am I to deny passage on the quest for knowledge, Professor Granger?" he drawls, sitting back and crossing his arms across his chest.

Hermione sucks in a sharp breath at the sight, his white oxford hugging his chest at this movement. The fabric clings to his arms, accentuating the muscles that he'd acquired over the years. She reels in her train of thought before it can take off into the depths of her daydreams, reminding herself that there is a student currently present in the room.

"And what did you learn today Miss Murphy?" Hermione asks, feeling her skin grow hot from the mere presence of the potion's professor. Something about watching him interact with their students has always sent a lovely feeling of warmth to her abdomen - a fact she opts to analyze at a later date.

"Well, I managed to extract lots of flobberworm mucus," the girl beams, holding up her various vials as proof.

"Oh, well, that's excellent," Hermione replies, feeling slightly awkward about her presence.

"Miss Murphy, shall we continue next week?" Draco asks, politely dismissing the small witch.

"Yes please!" the girl replies eagerly, beginning to pack up her few belongings.

After the girl has scurried into the hall with a spring in her step, Hermione turns to Draco with a sheepish sort of smile. "That's very kind of you to offer these extra lessons to Beatrice."

"Well, it's hard to say no to a student that's so eager to learn," he replies, leaning against the counter behind him.

"Snape never did allow me to do extra potions work," she laughs.

“Did you even bother to ask?” Draco smiles, clearly amused at the possibility of such a conversation.

“I did actually, he didn’t even dignify me with a response,” she replies with a hough.

“I feel like that’s the best-case scenario, Granger. I can’t even imagine what he would have said if he did speak,” Draco laughs.

Hermione nods, holding back a laugh. Draco is right, after all, she can practically hear Snape’s signature drawl: *“Miss Granger you’re enough of an insufferable know it all during my regular classes, what on earth has possessed you to believe that I would want to spend my personal time enabling your incessant need to be better than everyone else?”*

After a beat, Hermione asks, “did you want to go on a walk?”

“Sure, Granger,” Draco smiles, summoning his coat and frayed Slytherin scarf from the nearby closet.

December 12, 2000, Kirk’s Pond, Oxford

“Draco I’m freezing,” Hermione laughs, her cheeks flushed from the cold.

“Granger, you’re a witch, cast a warming charm,” Draco replies with a grin, speeding by her at an alarming speed.

Hermione isn’t sure why she’d agreed to ice skating on the pond with Draco. She’s never been one to enjoy the feeling of standing on frozen water with only a thin blade of metal to keep her balance. But, something about the giddy expression he’d had when he asked had eased all the worries from her mind, each thought evaporating into nothingness like whips of smoke.

Truthfully, she would do almost anything to have even a glimpse into the childlike self that Draco had been allowing her to witness as of late. She found it cathartic to witness Draco’s barriers falling away, his authentic self coming to the forefront for possibly the first time in his life.

Hermione believes that it’s healthy for him to be carefree and borderline childish from time to time. She knows that he will never regain all the childhood years that he’d lost, but is certain that this is the next best option. She believes that deep down, somewhere underneath the polished yet rugged exterior is Draco’s childhood self – a young boy who had been forced to grow up far too quickly, his life’s path determined for him by everyone other than himself.

More than anything, she wishes that Draco hadn’t had to undergo all of the tribulations that he had. And so, when he proposes an activity that Hermione knows will allow his childhood self to heal, and experience the small joys in life, she is more than happy to oblige.

The pond is a beautiful sight, truthfully. Though Hermione remains certain that she would much rather observe from the safety of the shore. With a sigh, she casts a warming charm and takes off, attempting to keep up with the wizard. Eventually, he slows and begins to skate backwards, beckoning her towards him. He grins wildly, his arms outstretched in her direction. She pushes forward awkwardly, her legs wobbly. She gains momentum, and just when she thinks she may have finally gotten the hang of this horrid activity, she trips.

She comes crashing into Draco's chest, her arms flailing. But, before she can crumble onto the ice, she comes to a sudden halt, her body now being supported by a very firm wizard with a quidditch build.

"Sorry," she blushes, embarrassed by the entire ordeal.

"I've got you, Granger, don't worry," he smiles, helping her regain her balance. They stay that way for a moment, their bodies mere inches from one another, breath heavy.

Draco feels the familiar scent of strawberries and honey waft towards him, his mind growing hazy as he realizes how far they've come. He feels giddy in her presence, his face aching from the grin that seems to be omnipresent when Hermione is nearby. He can feel her pulse in her wrists as he grips them tightly, and the whisper of her breath as she stares in his direction.

Hermione finds herself unable to tear her eyes away from Draco, her feet both literally and metaphorically frozen into place. She is acutely aware of the presence of his callused hands around her wrists, the way he seems to be holding his breath.

"Did you want to head home?" she asks, unable to bear the tension any longer.

Draco wordlessly nods, guiding her towards the shore, his hands never leaving her wrists. "There you go, Granger, you've got it," he smiles, observing the witch's attempts to steer herself toward the snow.

She beams at this comment, though she isn't entirely sure why.

When the pair return home, Draco turns towards the door to his flat, reaching as if to enter. "Where are you going?" Hermione asks, aghast.

"To shower," he replies simply.

"I'll be showering as well," she adds, hoping that he'll understand her intended meaning.

"Oh?" he asks, raising his eyebrows as a devilish sort of grin spreads across his face. "And would it be alright with you if I joined you for such an endeavour?"

"I believe that would be acceptable," she smiles, opening her door with the wave of her wand. Draco eagerly trails after the witch, finding himself growing increasingly *excited* in anticipation.

He watches with bated breath as she slowly pulls off her various layers of clothing, shedding each article at a glacial pace. "Granger you're killing me here," he groans. "Can't we just vanish them all and be done with it?"

"Where's the fun in that?" she smirks as she points her index finger at the shower, it quickly coming to life, hot water beginning to cascade from above.

While she's distracted, Draco vanishes his clothes, not wanting to delay this experience any further. She yelps in surprise as he smirks and picks her up before stepping into the shower and positioning them under the scalding hot water. The steam wraps around them, enveloping them entirely, shielding them from the outside world.

With his hands gripping her steadily, he pushes her up against the tiled wall behind her as she wraps her legs around him with a grin.

“You’re incorrigible,” she whispers, bringing her lips toward his.

He meets her in the middle, returning a small bite to her lower lip, dragging it out gently without breaking eye contact. Water droplets cascade down their faces, dripping down their bodies.

Hermione can feel her heart rate rising steadily, her core tightening at the feeling of Draco pressed firmly against her. She can’t help but wonder why they just started doing this, why they’d danced around one another for over a year when they could have been doing *this* .

Draco loves seeing Hermione in almost any state of undress, but at this moment, he’s convinced that a soaking-wet Hermione –in more ways than one – is his personal favourite.

He hoists her higher, relishing in the way her tits bounce against his chest as he does. He nips at her throat, lifting her even higher so that her tits are in line with his mouth. Holding her steady with one arm, he brings one callused hand toward her nipple, pinching it ever so slightly.

“Please,” she moans into his ear as she begins to squirm. Draco’s mind reels, loving nothing more than the way Hermione enjoys ordering him around in such positions – the way she unabashedly begs for what she wants.

“Whatever you say, love,” he smiles, pushing her against the wall as he reaches down to position his length beneath her dripping cunt. He presses the tip gently against her clit as he stares at her petulantly, enjoying watching her squirm in anticipation.

“May I?” he asks with a smirk. Hermione whimpers in response, nodding her head eagerly. In one swift motion, he lowers her onto his cock, groaning as he feels her cunt envelop him entirely.

She releases a long high-pitched moan as she wraps her arms around his neck more tightly, already anticipating what’s next. She begins to nip at his ear, whispering “Draco,” knowing all too well that he turns positively feral when she uses his given name.

Sure enough, he braces her lower back with his hands, their sheer size gripping her so completely that she allows her core to go slack, leaning her shoulders against the wall behind her.

Not even a second later, he begins to lift her up and down, sliding her against his cock. He doesn’t thrust himself toward her in the slightest, much preferring the feeling of her cunt sliding against his length. He tosses his head back in pleasure as he begins to quicken the pace.

Hermione begins to release one breathy moan after the next. “Harder, fuck me harder,” she begs.

Happy to oblige, Draco begins to thrust at the precise moment he lowers her body toward him, keeping a punishing pace as her body slaps against his. “So good, Granger, I love watching you take my cock,” he moans, his gaze never leaving Hermione’s face.

He loves watching her come undone, watching her tits bounce as her cunt clenches against his length.

“*Fuck* Draco, *fuck* , I’m going to cum,” she starts to whimper, her pitch becoming higher and higher with every thrust. Removing one arm from around his neck, she starts to play with her

nipple, plucking and pulling at it.

As he fucks her faster, her moans increase. He bottoms out, evoking a pleasure-filled squeal from her lips. He feels the tension continue to build, and his cock grows harder. But, he's determined to bring Hermione to her release before even considering his own.

Slowing his pace, he guides her free hand toward her clit, staring at her with fire in his eyes. Without any words of disagreement, she begins to circle her clit, a gasp escaping her lips.

"So fucking hot," he moans, watching her bring herself closer to release. He watches her finger, matching his pace as she speeds her movements. Within seconds they're back to their original pace, Draco lifting and lowering her onto his length as she continues to play with her clit, breathy moans and incoherent words escaping her swollen lips.

"So good, Granger," he utters breathlessly, feeling himself reach the point of near-release once more.

Suddenly, his witch begins to squirm, her movements and breaths frantic. "Fuck, fuck, fuck," she moans, reaching a point of pure ecstasy, her entire body tingling with pleasure. "I want to feel you cum in me," she whispers breathlessly.

The moment the words leave her lips, any kind of restraint that Draco had possessed quickly disappears, a primal feeling of *want* overriding all his other senses. With a groan, he feels himself come undone. Hermione's cunt twitches against his length as she releases a shriek, beginning to writhe as her orgasm reaches its peak.

They stay in this position for a moment, both panting as they attempt to come down from the lust-fueled high they'd just achieved. Hermione is the first to recover, leaning in to kiss him with love and reverence. He slowly lifts her from his length, watching her with rapt attention.

"Fuck, you're perfect," he whispers, staring at her naked body, the warm droplets of water cascading down her curves. He brings his lips crashing into her's once more, determined to spend the rest of his day tangled in her embrace.

January 20th, 2007, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

"Are you sure?" Caitlyn asks her tone one of worry.

"Yes, of course, I go to my Fathers' home all the time," Cassie replies.

"So your fathers think we're at school at the school thinks we're at your fathers'?" Caitlyn clarifies.

"Precisely."

"And we're *actually* going?" Caitlyn asks.

"To Muggle London," Cassie grins. "You can't come to Britain and not see it!"

"And we'll be back before curfew?"

"Yes, Cait, I promise."

Once across the threshold of the Hogwarts barriers, the pair apparates to London. They arrive in Diagon Alley in front of The Leaky Cauldron, fresh snow beneath their feet.

Caitlyn looks around in awe, observing the hustle and bustle of Wizarding London.

“Through here!” Cassie urges her, pushing the door to the Leaky Cauldron open. They are greeted by the warm atmosphere of the cozy establishment. Candles sit atop the wooden tables, their wax slowly dripping to the surface below. Hannah moves about the space, floating a tray of butterbeer alongside her.

Not wanting to be seen by too many people who may report back to a member of staff, the pair weave their way to the other side of the establishment. They emerge onto Charing Cross Road, the street busy with the usual Saturday traffic.

Cassie threads her hand into Caitlyn’s, grinning as she guides her down the road.

After visiting a record shop, a bakery, a sweets shop, and a liquor store, the pair find themselves in a cozy diner, the table laden with a plethora of food.

As Cassie sips on her strawberry milkshake, she grows quiet. The conversation had arrived at a topic that she had been pondering quite frequently as of late: her birth parents.

Truth be told, Cassie doesn’t necessarily *care* who they are. She knows that this information wouldn’t change anything about her life in the slightest. Her fathers would still be the only people she views as her parents, that much is certain.

But, Cassie has always been an overly curious person, and something about not knowing leaves her with a feeling much like an itch that she never seems to be able to scratch.

She knows that they’d been awful people, her brain injury as a child is more than enough proof of this claim. However, she can’t help but want to know who they are – and which family she originates from.

This train of thought had originated a few weeks prior when she’d stumbled upon a text about blood curses. She’d learned that these curses could be passed down either maternally or paternally, and usually lay dormant until one is around the age of eighteen.

She’d shivered at the thought because if this was something common in her ancestry, she would be blissfully unaware of it. And so, after signing out the book in question under Madam Pince’s stare, she’d torn through her trunk in search of the pamphlet that Hermione had given her a few months prior. She knows that Mione hadn’t meant anything by it, she had simply wanted Cassie to know that the choice existed, should she want to know.

She loves that about her godmother – how supportive she is, and how she understands the importance of *choice* .

At the time, she’d tossed the pamphlet into the bottom of her trunk, almost forgetting about it entirely. She’d been feeling guilty for the past few days, the test kit in her trunk somehow feeling like a *betrayal* of her fathers. She knows that neither of them will be upset, and will more than likely be supportive; but, she can’t seem to shake the feeling that it’s wrong for her to *want* to find out.

“Cass, if you want to do it, you should,” Caitlyn encourages, dipping her chip into a large dollop of ketchup.

“But what if it's better that I don't know?” Cassie replies, brow furrowed.

“I think that you'll always want to know and that you'll inevitably take the test at some point. May as well get it over with,” the Canadian witch explains.

Cassie takes a moment to appreciate just how well Caitlyn already seems to know her after such a short period of time. She's never felt this way toward someone, truthfully. Sure, she's had many flings over the years, but none of these had come anywhere close to the kind of relationship she and Caitlyn had formed.

While she isn't trying to get ahead of herself, Cassie is certain that Caitlyn is the best thing that's happened to her in a very long time.

After apparating back to Hogsmede and sneaking into the grounds ten minutes before curfew, Caitlyn comes to a sudden halt.

“Cass,” she whispers, minuscule snowflakes gathering gently on her eyelashes.

Cassie turns to her expectantly, suddenly growing worried at Caitlyn's tone.

“I hope I didn't overstep earlier, telling you to take the test.”

“No, Cait, of course not! I appreciate that I have you to talk about this with,” the Slytherin smiles, approaching the witch next to her. She laces her hands through hers once more, beginning to rub her thumb over the backs of Caitlyn's hands.

“Okay,” the girl nods, leaning in to place a delicate kiss on Cassie's lips.

Cassie groans, mostly because she wants nothing more than to snog Caitlyn right then and there. The blonde witch looks so beautiful, she thinks, the moonlight accentuating her already striking features. But, alas, they have a curfew to be mindful of. “Room of Requirement?” she asks eagerly.

“I can't, Professor Williams will notice if I never come back,” Caitlyn pouts, biting at her lower lip in frustration.

“Fine, tomorrow then?” Cassie asks, leaning forward for another kiss.

“Promise,” Caitlyn nods with a grin.

Just as the pair step into the Entrance Hall, they come face to face with none other than Professor Williams. Her arms are crossed and her eyebrows are raised. “Miss Jones, so lovely of you to return,” she seethes.

“I made sure to be back before curfew!” the girl replies quickly.

“And where were you?”

“At Cassie's fathers'.”

“Oh? And why is it that you thought you could leave the grounds?”

“Well, it’s just in Hogsmede,” Caitlyn begins, pointing over her shoulder as if to support her claim.

“You’re not to leave the grounds again. Understood?” Professor Williams scolds, her eyes filled with fury, glaring at Cassie more so than Caitlyn.

“Yes Professor,” Caitlyn replies, lowering her gaze.

As the witch trails after her professor, Cassie is left alone in the Entrance Hall. She’d wanted to say something - anything - but she knows that she would most likely just make matters worse for Caitlyn. And so, she makes her way to the Slytherin common room, deciding that there’s no better time to take her genealogy test. Caitlyn had been right, of course – this itch was not going away any time soon.

She deserves to know.

Chapter End Notes

I LOVE hearing your theories about who Cassie's birth parents are! So far I haven't seen anyone guess it. Unfortunately, the results of her test will not be revealed for quite a few chapters.

Hope you enjoyed the SMUTTTTTTTT - hopefully, these types of scenes help establish why there was so much initial tension between our favourite professors.

A Library & A Planetarium

Chapter Notes

Hoping to have more frequent updates this month since I will be on holidays from school! I hope you enjoy this chapter, it has been one of my favourites to write so far.

As always, beta love to whits_end ♥ & the ever-present support of callcalypso & likelyunfinished.

Also a huge thank you to amour_anguis for helping me plan out this chapter - be sure to check out her current WIP "TEETH" if you haven't already!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It has been a long week of lessons for Professor Malfoy, especially when it came to dealing with his NEWT students. Many of them had spiralled into a tizzy over the past few weeks, fretting about their acceptances to various Mastery programs and Ministry positions. He'd written no less than five letters of recommendation, a request that had baffled him each and every time.

Surely these students didn't want an Ex-Death Eater as their reference? He'd mentioned this casually to Granger over a cup of tea, who had assured him they held his letters in the same regard as hers.

"If they're pursuing a Mastery of Potions, your referral would carry the most weight," she'd explained.

He tried to believe her, but it still didn't sit right with him. He doesn't want to put these exceptionally bright students at a disadvantage by associating himself with them.

Cassie is one of the many students to ask for a letter, though she asked for it to be generic as she wasn't yet certain where she would be applying. Draco is certain that the witch will be accepted anywhere she so pleases, her exam scores rivalling those of her Godmother.

As her head of house, he decides to take the time to ask her about her ambitions. "And what are your plans for your future, Miss Lupin-Black?" he smiles, his arms crossed across his chest.

"I haven't the foggiest, sir," she replies simply.

He skims her scores and various extracurricular involvements, realising just how little he had done throughout his own time as a student. Apart from his time as a prefect, and his position on the Quidditch team, he'd been wholly uninvolved. He supposes he had been rather occupied, but as he peruses the multitude of clubs and societies that Cassie had been a part of over the past seven years, he wishes he could have had such opportunities.

"Perhaps you could put your debate team skills to use at the Ministry?" he asks.

"I would rather die than enter the world of bureaucracy," she drawls.

“Fair enough,” the professor nods.

“Professional quidditch?”

“Not mentally stimulating enough.”

“A Mastery of Charms, or Alchemy perhaps?” he suggests, thinking of her godmother.

“So I can be the next Mione?” she laughs, eyebrow raised.

“How about healing? Your scores in charms, potions, and herbology are surely high enough,” he smiles.

The witch remains quiet for a moment. “Maybe,” she nods. “But I’d rather not spend my day fixing idiots who have gone and blown themselves up.”

“Well, there are many areas of healing, even research,” he explains.

“I suppose,” Cassie replies, her tone one of disinterest.

Deciding that this topic is a lost cause, the Professor switches gears. “Now, Miss Lupin-Black, I do believe you are ready to learn Legilimency,” he smiles, leaning forward to rest his elbows against his desk.

She perks up at this, her eyes growing wide. “Really?”

“Yes, you have more than mastered Occlumency, an impressive feat to say the least.” Draco had been highly impressed by the speed at which Cassie had managed to block him out almost entirely. He was certain that this would be sufficient for the purposes of the tournament. “That it would be an asset, no?”

She nods eagerly, “yes, of course, sir.”

“We will start with the basics then,” he smiles. “Much like Occlumency, there are many methods that can be used to form a connection between your mind and another’s. Your chosen method is entirely dependent on the way you use your brain.”

Cassie continues to nod, her eyes glazing over slightly as she takes in this information.

“How do you learn?” he asks, leaning back in his chair and fighting a smile. If he had to guess...

“Er, mostly through reading.” It’s Draco’s turn to nod at Cassie, pleased with his accurate prediction.

“Do you find you learn better from written texts than listening in class? Or watching a demonstration?” he prods.

“Yes.” A beat passes as her brows furrow in thought, presumably mulling over her instinctual answer. “Definitely,” she confirms.

“Okay, just like Professor Granger then,” he smiles.

Cassie grins at this, quite thrilled that Professor Malfoy had spoken openly about the witch.

“Do you know what a teleprompter is?” Draco asks. Cassie only shakes her head in reply.

“A teleprompter, also known as an autocue, is a muggle display device that prompts the person speaking with an electronic visual text of a speech or script. Using a teleprompter is similar to using cue cards,” he explains. “For people who learn best via written text, the teleprompter method is usually the most successful. I am much more of a visual learner. I make use of the film method, while those who learn best through sound typically employ the radio method. For the film method, one pictures the other person’s thoughts as just that: a film. Their memories, thoughts, and feelings can be seen as if through a Pensieve, except the visual will be displayed within the person’s eyes. The radio method is similar. One will be able to hear the person’s memories, thoughts, and feelings as if through a radio, their eyes acting as a beacon for the soundwave.”

Cassie’s eyes grow wide at this, already deciphering how her method will work.

“Based on this information, how do you think the teleprompter method works?” Professor Malfoy asks.

“I’m assuming that you picture their thoughts, memories, and feelings as scrolling text within their eyes,” the girl supposes.

“Precisely,” he smiles.

“To form a connection, it’s always easiest to look into the person’s eyes,” he explains. “Obviously, this isn’t always possible, but it’s the best for when you’re just starting out.”

Cassie nods eagerly, ready to attempt the act.

“First, I want you to close your eyes and picture your own thoughts as text. It may take a moment, but you must be patient with yourself.”

Cassie does as instructed and turns inwards, focusing on her present thoughts. She’d been worried about Caitlyn all day, fretting that she’d gotten her in trouble with her professor. She focuses on this train of thought, allowing wisps of words to appear in her mind. They materialise as ink in the air before her in her own handwriting, each word appearing with fluid brush strokes.

She opens her eyes and silently nods, alerting Professor Malfoy to her success.

“Good,” he nods, yet again impressed at the level of control the witch has over her own mind.

“Now, for your first few times, I will bring a memory to the forefront of my mind, one that should be easy for you to access.”

Cassie nods once more, awaiting further guidance.

“I’m curious to see how you’ll go about this. See if you can find the thought,” he encourages.

Cassie furrows her brow as she stares at the Potions professor, feeling entirely unprepared. She hasn’t the slightest idea how to view his thoughts, especially with a face as stoic as his. She’s always been quite adept at reading people’s emotions through their expressions and body language, but Professor Malfoy has never been one to unwillingly give up any kind of information whatsoever.

She chooses to focus on how the written words had appeared in her mind, her loopy cursive detailing her every thought. She wonders if perhaps, it would be easier to envision the Professor's handwriting – the one she sees many times a week on the blackboard behind him.

She stares at his grey eyes, making an effort to keep her expression still regardless of how silly she feels. She isn't quite sure what she's looking for exactly, nor how to form this connection between their minds. But, a split second before she relinquishes, she notices a wisp pass through his iris. She narrows her eyes, focusing on where the wisp had appeared.

Sure enough, another appears. This time, she can decipher it isn't a shapeless wisp at all, but rather a word.

Hermione.

She allows her mind to barrel towards the word, eyes glazing over. She grabs ahold of the H, allowing it to tug her into the mind of Professor Malfoy.

She wasn't sure what she'd been expecting, really, but it certainly hadn't been this.

His mind is welcoming, taking shape as a flat. Rows and rows of tomes surround her, stacked haphazardly, potted plants crowning the numerous bookshelves. A plush green couch sits amongst the cosy scene, a ray of sunlight piercing the room

She notices a yoga mat laid on the floor, one that resembles Mione's.

Suddenly, it clicks.

Her eyes scan the scene, recognising various objects that belong to her godmother. It makes sense, she supposes. It had been her name that had brought her into his mind, after all.

She doesn't recognise the space, but as she walks around, she notices a University of Oxford Quidditch knit hung over the back of a chair.

Mione's Oxford apartment.

She grins, wondering what memory Professor Malfoy could possibly intend to show her. She isn't certain how she's meant to find this memory, but she remains optimistic.

She hears a noise and whips around toward the source, her eyes landing on a younger Professor Malfoy. He had appeared seemingly out of nowhere, his body translucent. The blonde moves around the kitchen, flicking on various switches and buttons, his brow furrowed. He taps his wand on the coffee maker, causing it to whirl to life. He nods, satisfied, though still bewildered by the rest of the appliances.

Suddenly, Hermione emerges from what Cassie assumes is her bedroom. The witch's hair is twisted into a plait, plaid pyjamas enveloping her slight frame.

Cassie can hear her voice as if through an echo, large glowing letters appearing before her.

"I'm going to visit Remus, Sirius, and Cassie today," the words read.

Draco nods as he pours a cup of coffee for the witch, sliding it across the counter towards her.

“Cassie is your goddaughter, yes?” he asks.

“Yes, though I often think of her as my little sister,” the witch admits. Cassie feels her heart constrict, her admiration for Hermione almost too much to bear.

“She just started at Hogwarts this year,” Hermione adds, taking a sip of her coffee.

“Oh? A Gryffindor I presume?” Draco drawls.

“No, a Slytherin actually,” Hermione smiles. “She’s brilliant, in a cunning sort of way.”

Draco nods, “And how did her fathers feel about that?” he asks.

“They were happy for her. I think they knew she was a Slytherin from the moment they adopted her,” she smiles. “They’re both aware that Slytherins aren’t all bad, you know.”

“Well, I’m certainly glad that the narrative has shifted,” Draco replies, averting his gaze.

“Maybe you could meet her one day—Cassie.”

“Maybe someday.”

Cassie feels herself pulling out of Professor Malfoy’s mind, suddenly coming back into her own body in the Potions Classroom.

“Very good, Miss Lupin-Black,” he nods.

Cassie remains silent, unsure of what to say. It is logical, she supposes, that he opted to show her a memory of Hermione, much like she had. It had been a bizarre feeling to witness someone else’s memory in that way.

Hearing how her godmother spoke of her when she wasn’t present felt like a warm embrace. But it also made her smile to know that her fathers had anticipated her Slytherin qualities from the moment they’d met her.

She’d been worried at first when she’d been sorted into the house of the snakes. Her fathers had so many fond memories of Gryffindor house, and her godparents as well. At the age of eleven, when the dusty old hat had declared her a Slytherin, she’d almost frowned.

Would they be upset? Disappointed?

But, when she’d contacted her fathers through their two-way mirror later that evening, they’d both congratulated her with gushing smiles. “Just like your Uncle Reg,” Sirius had beamed.

“That’s all for today, Miss Lupin-Black,” Professor Malfoy nods. “You’ve done very well.”

As she turns to leave, however, he adds, “Oh, and please be sure to not use this newfound skill on your peers.”

The witch nods with a grin, laughing at just how well the Potions professor seems to know her.

“What should I wear?” Hermione asks, face flushed.

“Whatever you want, Granger,” Draco replies simply, laying back against the witch’s numerous pillows.

“Is this a fancy outing?” she prods.

“No, not in the slightest,” he smiles, flipping to lie on his side so that he can better observe the flustered witch.

“Then why are you dressed like *that* ?” she retorts, gesturing to his current ensemble. She doesn’t want to look frumpy when he looks like, well, that. She finds it irksome how perfectly effortless the wizard always looks – his hair tousled, the top two buttons of his oxford hanging open, his expertly tailored trousers hugging his arse just so.

“What?” he exclaims. “These are my casual, everyday clothes.”

Rolling her eyes, the witch turns back to her wardrobe, flipping through her few options. “Are denims okay then?” she asks.

“They would be more than acceptable,” Draco nods, attempting to remain impassive. Secretly, he celebrates this suggestion, overjoyed at the prospect of getting to observe her arse in those splendid muggle creations for the evening.

“Turn around while I change,” the witch says quickly.

“Granger, I’ve seen you undress many times before,” Draco argues, his response like that of a petulant child that has been denied sweets.

“Well this is different,” she retorts, taking on her signature confrontational stance.

“Very well,” Draco relents, reluctantly flipping to face the wall. His mind spins as he listens to the sounds of Hermione undressing, having to hold back a groan as he hears the band of her knickers come into contact with her hips.

“Okay, I’m ready,” the witch smiles, standing awkwardly as the wizard flips back towards her.

He silently sits up, swinging his legs off of the bed and stands. He saunters over, his eyes taking in every single inch of the witch before him.

“Do I look ok?” she asks anxiously.

“Granger, you look lovely,” he smiles, his gaze finally coming to meet hers.

Hermione grins. “Lead the way, Professor Malfoy.”

Draco has to do everything in his power to stop himself from becoming visibly aroused. Something about the way his title rolls off the witch’s tongue has rendered him positively weak in the knees. He tries to not let his mind wander to his various childhood fantasies of the witch, many of which involve her in her school uniform, uttering the very same words.

“Muggle London?” Hermione asks the minute they arrive in the snowy alleyway.

Draco only nods, threading his fingers through Hermione's and leading her toward the street.

"Chancery Lane!" she exclaims, her tone giddy.

"Yes Granger, our destination is just up the street," Draco smiles.

As they approach the large grey stone building, Hermione comes to a sudden halt. Though she doesn't like to pick favourites, the Maughan Library is a close second to the Hogwarts Library in her mind. She had spent many days as a child within these ancient walls, loving nothing more than exploring the shelves with whichever of her parents she could convince to join her.

The domed reading room had always been her favourite space, the circular area with multiple floors of shelves creating a comforting sort of atmosphere.

But how could Malfoy know of this place? How did he know how much this library means to her?

"You alright, Granger?" he asks, his brow furrowed.

"Yes, of course," she nods, continuing forward up the small steps.

She has to fight the urge to run forward and barrel into the library that she hasn't visited in many years – wanting nothing more than to feel its embrace one more. But, instead of Draco pushing through the large stained-glass doors, he takes a sharp left, stopping in front of a seemingly solid brick wall. He taps his wand on three bricks in some sort of pattern, uttering an incantation under his breath. Suddenly, the bricks begin to spin, revealing a large red door.

Hermione gasps, the realisation that a magical entrance had existed in this library all this time smacking her across the face. Was this why she'd been so drawn to it in the first place? Had the magic in her veins beckoning her toward the door like a moth to a flame? She never ceases to be amazed by how much magic exists amongst the mundane, how many traces of the wizarding world had existed at her fingertips before she was even aware of their existence.

"Come on, Granger," he smiles, pushing the door open and leading them up a small spiral staircase. Hermione takes her time as she makes her way up the ancient steps, dragging her fingers against the stone.

Eventually, they emerge into a large room, the walls and ceiling both made of stained glass depicting scenes from folklore, allowing for one to take in the London skyline around them. The stars above them twinkle as if in greeting, charmed candlesticks floating just below flickering in the moonlight.

"It's beautiful," she whispers, rushing forward to the nearest shelf. "I had no clue this existed."

"I used to come here every so often with my mother," Draco explains, glancing around the room – his eyes becoming hazy as the memories of his younger self come rushing toward him. He longs for those days of childlike naivety when his only worries had been how many books he could cram into his bag, and how fast he could fly on his broom.

The witch turns to face him. "You came here?" she asks.

"Yes," Draco nods, slightly confused.

"I did too, with my parents. Well, to the muggle library," she explains.

“Really?” Draco asks, surprised. His mind spins, wondering if perhaps his path had nearly crossed with the curly-haired witch before they ever met at Hogwarts. Though, he supposes that would have been unlikely given that his mother and he had always taken the floo directly to this portion of the library.

“I wonder if we were ever here at the same time,” Hermione mutters under her breath, echoing Draco’s train of thought.

“Perhaps we were,” he smiles. “We can look around for a bit, then I thought we could go for dinner.”

“You said nothing fancy!” Hermione exclaims, already worrying that Draco has some Michelin-star restaurant planned for their evening.

“Well, there’s a chip shop up the road,” he suggests. “Theo says it’s good.”

Hermione grins. “That sounds perfect.”

Hermione shovels her last few chips into her mouth, practically groaning as she does. She loves greasy muggle foods, dishes that certainly aren’t served by Hogwarts’ elves. As she sips happily on her strawberry milkshake, Draco cuts his hamburger with a knife and fork, delicately bringing his portion toward his mouth.

“Malfoy,” she laughs at the sight. “You can eat with your hands.”

“Granger, you know very well I am incapable of such a thing,” he replies, dabbing his napkin at the corner of his mouth.

“Oh yes, how silly of me, Professor Malfoy,” the witch teases.

“Fuck you calling me Professor like it doesn’t turn you on just to say it,” Draco smirks as he raises both his eyebrows.

Hermione gasps at this proclamation, though she has to admit that there was some truth to his statement. She found him exceptionally attractive in his professor’s robes, and she may or may not have many fantasies associated with the ensemble.

She’s thrilled with how their Valentine’s had been spent. She’d been worried that Malfoy would make a big deal out of the event, despite knowing just how much Hermione loathes the day. It’s not that she dislikes the celebration of love, no that is certainly not where this loathing comes from.

She supposes it’s the frivolous way that people spend the day, turning it into a competition of sorts. Like other celebrations, Valentine’s day has changed and evolved over time to become the capitalistic showcase of affection that it is today.

Some people believe that Valentine’s Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Saint Valentine’s death or burial. However, others claim the Christian church may have placed St. Valentine’s feast day in the middle of February in an effort to “Christianize” the pagan celebration of Lupercalia. Celebrated at the ides of February, or February fifteenth, Lupercalia was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

Hermione isn't sure how the day had evolved from *that* to purchasing chocolates and various pink plastic decorations from the shops in an attempt to showcase your love – but she's never been a fan. No, Hermione is of the belief that one should remind those that they love of their affections far more frequently than once a year.

Visiting a library and a chip shop was the perfect Valentine's date, in Hermione's opinion. Then again, Draco had always excelled at planning dates for the occasion.

February 14th, 2001, Oxford

"Draco!" Hermione exclaims, beaming at the wizard standing next to her. He looks quite proud of himself, his cheeks flushed with a grin on his face.

She'd been hesitant at first, to take the portkey to their destination without knowing where exactly it would land her. She's very busy after all, finalising her dissertation, analysing their data sets from their most recent dragon fever trials, and teaching yoga at the senior centre near campus.

But Draco had insisted she take the night off, citing Valentine's day as his reason. After enduring a brief lecture regarding the ridiculous capitalistic notion of the day, Hermione had relented, taking hold of the gravy boat portkey.

The Royal Observatory Edinburgh stands tall before them, its ancient brownstone and domed green roof beckoning them forward.

"What do you have planned?" she smiles.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Draco drawls in reply, slipping his hand into hers.

They silently enter the building, Draco flicking his wand casually in various directions, causing lights to flicker on as they approach. They wind their way up a small staircase, emerging into the Planetarium.

An enhanced version of the night sky greets them, footage of various planets and celestial objects coming into view. Hermione tilts her head back in awe, observing the sheer magnificence of the sight. She quickly locates Ursa major, followed by Cepheus, and finally Draco.

Hermione has always loved the night sky. At one point, Hermione had been certain that she would grow up to become an astronaut someday. She could remember the day that she'd discovered a book on the galaxies at the library, starting an obsession unlike any other. Her sixth birthday had been space themed, her mom creating a small cake for each of the planets. She'd purposefully set them up on individual plates out of order, hoping to witness her daughter's reaction.

It was one of her favourite stories to tell, the way Hermione's brow furrowed in confusion, her eyes going wide in shock at the sheer *wrongness* of the display. The young girl had looked up to her mother, her honey-brown eyes filled with concern – as if worried that the planets themselves would be upset by the error.

"Which order do they go in?" her mother had asked as if to test her daughter's understanding. Hermione climbed onto the stool, her tiny arms reaching towards the plates and shuffling them around until she was satisfied.

Hermione had been fascinated by the stars and the concept of other galaxies for as long as she can remember. She enjoys the way that they make me feel small – the stark reminder of just how inconsequential her existence is always a great comfort.

But, somewhere along the way, as so many of us do, Hermione lost touch with these dreams – this fascination. Somewhere along the way, little Hermione was lost, replaced by a much less agreeable, older Hermione who was so focused on the much more minuscule radius of her existence that she forgot about the endless abyss of galaxies around her.

Hermione longs for this version of herself – the way she was able to float through life, unbothered by the things occurring around her, happy to spend her day with her nose in a book laying in the sun. She misses the Hermione that existed before life became real – before seemingly everything began to cause a feeling of uneasiness in her gut.

She misses the way she would simply lay and stare out of her small bedroom window, smiling as the stars would twinkle off in the distance.

Standing underneath her old friends tonight causes her voice to quiver and her hands to shake. Before she knows it, there is a single tear making its way down her cheek.

“Granger?” Draco asks suddenly, noticing the witch’s shift in demeanour. “Are you okay? Is there something wrong?”

“It’s perfect,” she smiles, her eyes glued to one constellation in particular. “Thank you,” she whispers, giving his hand a gentle squeeze.

“A family friend is the head of the establishment, so this is all ours for the evening,” he smiles, gesturing to the many seats around them.

“Draco, you shouldn’t have,” she beams.

“Well, I had to get creative considering my witch holds a concerningly strong grudge against Valentine’s day,” he laughs. “No Madam Puddifoot’s would do.”

“Quite right!” she grins, dragging him forward so that they are standing in the centre of the room, choosing not to focus on the way Draco had referred to her as *his witch* .

“Shall we watch the show?” he asks, transfiguring his handkerchief into a soft green blanket.

The minute they are seated, he snaps his fingers, and a small house elf appears next to them. “Master Draco sir!” the elf exclaims. “Is we ready?”

“Yes, we are ready,” the wizard smiles.

“Draco!” Hermione scolds, whacking him playfully on the chest.

“Granger, for the last time, my family’s elves are practically begging for me to give them tasks.”

Before she can speak another word of complaint, the elf reappears, a picnic basket in hand. “Heres we go, Master Draco! Everything yous is needing is in here.”

“Thank you, Tobey,” Draco smiles, beginning to unpack the contents of the basket.

Despite her earlier proclamation of disagreement, Hermione eagerly looks over his shoulder, attempting to decipher the sorts of food that they would be enjoying that evening. Her eyes go wide as she realises just how many dishes had been packed into the small wicker basket.

“Bouillabaisse, Quiche Lorraine, Coq au vin, Bœuf Bourguignon, Cassoulet, Escargots de Bourgogne, Moules marinières, and finally, Creme Brulée,” Draco smiles. “I know you like French food, but I wasn’t sure which dishes were your favourite, so I just asked Tobey to make whatever he thought we may like,” he continues to ramble.

“Draco, this is perfect,” Hermione grins. “Though I doubt we’ll be able to eat it all ourselves.”

“Speak for yourself woman, I’m a growing boy,” Draco retorts, taking an enthusiastic bite from the Cassoulet. “Oh, and the wine,” he says suddenly, procuring a bottle of white wine from the basket.

“Let me guess, aged since the Norman Conquest?” Hermione asks with a grin, eagerly cutting a slice of the quiche.

“Only thirteenth century, I’m afraid,” Draco frowns, momentarily believing that this fact could be viewed as disappointing for the witch.

“Oh, however will my refined palette cope,” Hermione exclaims, holding her palm dramatically over her heart.

“It pairs well with the Moules marinières, according to my mother,” Draco explains.

“And does Narcissa know that it is I who will be consuming this bottle of wine with you this evening?” Hermione asks cautiously. She’d been wondering if Draco’s parents were aware of whatever this was that had been transpiring between them. She’d hypothesised the week prior that Draco would likely leave his parents in the dark until they were officially courting, should that ever even occur. She assumes that it would likely be quite a headache to explain the nature of their ‘relationship’ to his parents at any point before this. She knows for a fact that the Malfoys are traditionalists and having casual sex with someone multiple times a week out of wedlock or official courtship certainly doesn’t align with these values in the slightest.

“She may,” Draco replies simply, flicking his wand toward the projection overhead.

Hermione decides this reply is satisfactory for the time being, determined to enjoy the evening rather than fretting about the *logistics* of their relationship.

After a two-hour showcase of the cosmos, Hermione is left positively breathless. Not only had the food been positively divine, but the company had been rather enjoyable as well. At some point, after the Creme Brulée had been polished off, Hermione had switched her position so that her arse pressed into Draco’s core ever so slightly. She made certain to stretch every now and then, or adjust how she was laying, just to assure that Draco was well and frustrated by the time the show came to an end.

“You’re trying to kill me,” he’d groaned, mimicking a thrust.

“Shhh,” she had replied, turning her face toward him with a scowl.

“Swot,” he’d whispered, peppering kisses up the back of her neck, pulling her closer.

Now, as they weave their way silently down the stairs and emerge into the cold winter air, she grins. “Fancy a walk?”

The pair take to the streets of Edinburgh, winding through the cobbled streets. After approximately fifteen minutes, Draco decides to toss caution to the wind, pinning Hermione up against the stone wall next to her. He begins to nip at her neck, and Hermione whimpers as she feels his smile against her skin.

“We can’t – not – we can’t here, Draco,” she whispers.

“Why not?” he asks, his low voice causing Hermione’s core to flutter.

“Because we’re in public,” she begins. “And I refuse to do *that thing you like* pressed up against a brick wall,” she adds, knowing that this phrase alone will convince him.

“Are you suggesting that you would do it, should we return home?” he asks, running his hands through her curls.

“Perhaps,” she grins, allowing her gaze to lock onto his.

“Fine, but let the record show that I would be more than happy to perform the deed right here,” Draco begins, his grand proclamation coming to a screeching halt the moment he hears Hermione gasp.

“Look!” she points eagerly.

Draco follows her finger, his eyes landing on a mangy grey cat. “Ah, yes, a stray cat, how lovely,” he drawls, attempting to pull the witch’s attention back to him.

“Pspspspspsp,” Hermione whispers, beckoning the cat forward. “Aren’t you a handsome boy,” she coos, as the cat begins to rub its face against the witch’s outstretched palm.

Draco frowns at this, displeased that this feline had garnered such attention from the witch. “Don’t you have a mangy beast of your own Granger?” he asks.

The witch falls silent, continuing to scratch behind the cat’s ear. “No, not anymore,” she replies, her voice almost a whisper.

Draco feels as if his heart is in his throat. He wants to kick himself for the insensitive comment. He crouches down next to the witch, deciding that his sexual escapades can take a back seat for the time being. “What happened?” he asks.

“I sent him away with my parents before seventh year,” she begins, wiping a tear from her eye. “I wanted them to have a bit of me with them, and I wanted him to be safe as well.”

Draco can sense that there’s more to it, so he remains silent, gently stroking Hermione’s back in an effort to soothe her distress.

“I guess he got out at some point and never returned. I think he’s too smart for his own good sometimes, but it’s highly unlikely that he managed to make it back to the UK from Australia.”

“I’m sorry, Granger,” Draco whispers. She turns to face him, tears streaming down her face.

“It’s okay,” she nods, attempting to convince herself more than Draco.

“We’ll find him one day,” Draco smiles, pulling the witch into a hug.

February 14th, 2007, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

“I have one last surprise for you, Granger,” Draco smiles.

“We said no gifts!” Hermione exclaims.

“Well, I don’t think you’ll mind this gift,” Draco argues. “Close your eyes,” he whispers.

Hermione obliges, albeit with a frown. She attempts to discern what Draco could be up to, listening as his dragon leather shoes come into contact with the stone floor of the dungeons. She follows him blindly, her hand laced into his until they come to a halt. It takes everything in her to not open her eyes when she hears a door open.

“Okay, open,” Draco whispers.

Hermione’s eyes flutter open, and at first, as she stares into Draco’s living quarters, she isn’t sure what she’s looking for. But, suddenly, there’s a small meow that emerges from just below her eye level.

She drops to her knees as her mind catches up to the sight she’s seeing.

Crookshanks is standing in the doorway to Malfoy’s quarters.

“Crooks,” she sobs, pulling the feline into a hug and burrowing her face into his fur. “You’re home Crooks, you’re home!”

Draco feels a single tear roll down his cheek at the sight. Her reaction alone was worth the months he’d spent searching for the orange beast.

“How did you find him?” she asks suddenly.

“Promise not to be upset by my methods?” he asks.

“I promise,” she nods, her grip on the Half-Kneazle unrelenting.

“I had Tobey searching for him,” Draco admits. “Elves can trace magical signatures, so I sent him to Australia with the walkman you gave me, and he was able to find Crookshanks by tracing the signal.”

“Draco,” Hermione sobs, standing to pull him into a hug, the fluffy Half-Kneazle pressed between them.

“Yes, well, it turns out that Crooks here was living quite comfortably with an elderly couple in Byron Bay, so I had Tobey buy them a fat ginger cat as a replacement, I’m sure they won’t even notice,” Draco continues, earning a whack from Crookshanks’ paw.

“He isn’t fat!” Hermione protests. “He’s fluffy.”

“Well, I hope you like your gift,” he smiles. Truthfully, he’d been hoping to locate the Half-Kneazle in time for Christmas, but there had been no such luck.

“Draco, I love it, I think this is quite possibly the best gift I’ve ever received,” she beams. “Thank you.”

The witch stands on her toes to place a small peck on his lips. “I don’t know how I’ll ever make it up to you.”

Draco returns her kiss for a few moments before pulling away, giving himself just enough distance to sweep his gaze down and drag it— *slowly*— back up to her face. A roguish expression takes over his aristocratic features before he replies in a low tone.

“I have a few ideas.”

Chapter End Notes

Did I include a fleabag reference because of a TikTok edit I saw while writing this? Yes, yes I did.

Did I cry while writing the ending of this chapter? Again, yes.

Banoffee Pie & Fantastic Beasts

Chapter Notes

Apologies in advance; I know this is technically a Dramione fic, but this chapter has almost no draco/hermione content. But, I hope you enjoy this chapter nonetheless, it focuses on Wolfstar & Cassie as she takes on the second task! I promise it's worth it as the next chapter is entirely Dramione fluff & smut!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end and callcalypso & a huge thank you to likelyunfinished for reading this chapter & providing feedback !! This fic would not be what it is today without this lovely team!

See chapter end notes for translations & further information :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hermione lays with her hair splayed across his pillow, her chest rising and falling with each breath. Her lips are speared into a smile, her cheeks flushed—no doubt from whatever nefarious activities they'd just been engaging in. Draco pulls her in towards him, happily suffocating himself amongst her curls.

But as his eyes flutter open, he realises it is in fact not Granger's curls that are suffocating him at all. No, the honour of his early morning asphyxiation seems to have been given to a frighteningly large orange Kneazle.

"Crookshanks," he grumbles, attempting to shove the orange ball of fur away. Draco isn't sure why he wakes up next to the beast multiple times a week, nor how the animal was managing to get past his wards.

He wonders if perhaps the cat is attempting to thank him for reuniting him with his owner—an attempt that Draco would be happy to do without.

He'd even tried to file a complaint with the beast's owner to no avail. "Aw Crooks, is Malfoy your new friend? Such a good boy," she'd cooed.

So, after slipping into a set of casual trousers and a grey oxford, Draco makes the familiar trip from his living quarters to Hermione's. Crookshanks happily trots along, staying by his side throughout the journey.

When they arrive in the Charms corridor, Draco knocks loudly on her door. He ruffles his hair ever so slightly and folds his arms across his chest in preparation. He'd started doing this motion much more frequently as of late, quite enjoying the way Granger's eyes would light up at the sight.

"Malfoy!" the witch exclaims as she opens the door. This time, however, it's Draco's eyes that widen. He hadn't laid his eyes on Hermione in her yoga attire for some time now, at least not outside of his dreams.

“Yoga?” he asks simply, entering her rooms without invitation. “Your familiar seems to have lost his way last night yet again,” he drawls, attempting to remain calm, cool, and collected.

“Oh, don’t pretend like you don’t secretly enjoy it,” she giggles.

“I can’t say I enjoy waking to a large ball of fur attempting to suffocate me. Have you put him up to this Granger? Trying to have me killed?”

“You caught me,” she smiles. “Tea?”

Hermione is very thankful for Draco’s arrival, a most welcome distraction from the day’s events.

The second task will commence in no less than three hours.

Hermione rolls her eyes as she observes how Cormac interacts with those around him, most notably the female champions. Normally, she’d step in—pulling the attention away from whatever poor victim he has his eyes on. But she knows that these three girls, in particular, are more than capable of standing up for themselves.

“Okay, champions!” he shouts, puffing his chest out in the process. “Second task today. I will not lie, this one will make the first task look like child’s play.”

Hermione feels her heart drop into her gut. Why did he have to say such a thing? The champions are no doubt already nervous—why make that worse?

“Each of you will be given a portkey at exactly 11:55. This will land you in your starting position for the task. At noon, red sparks will be set off, and you may leave the podium that you are standing on.”

Each of the champions nods in understanding.

“This task will be exactly 6 hours long. Your objective is simple.”

Cormac pauses, the corners of his mouth twitching. “Find your clue for the next task. There is a catch, however.”

He drops the pretense that he's not enjoying this, a full grin spanning his face as he continues speaking. “There are only 6 clues, and 8 of you.”

Hermione looks to the champions, whose faces had dropped with the information.

“The clues are a glowing orb that looks a little like this,” he continues, casting a visual of the clue in the air in front of him. “These clues are hidden, *and protected*.”

Visions of a Hungarian Horntail desperately protecting its eggs flash across Hermione’s mind, causing her to flinch.

“Once you find a clue, you must keep it safe until the six hours are over at exactly 18:00. However, your portkey will return you to the Castle should you wish to forfeit the task. Simply cast a Portus charm and you will be whisked away.”

The champions all nod, no doubt already planning the various ways they can protect themselves and their clue. Hermione tries to make eye contact with her goddaughter, wanting nothing more than to offer her a smile of reassurance.

“Oh, and one more thing,” Cormac adds, the devilish smile on his face giving a sinister edge to his light tone. “You will have no wand.”

The Arena

Cassie stands on a small circular podium, wearing the same kind of uniform as the previous task. She’d quickly cast a plait charm with her wand before reluctantly handing it over to McClaggen, her fingertips grazing the Sycamore wood.

She feels naked, almost *empty*, without the familiar piece of wood in her hand. She can’t remember the last time she’d been without it. Every night since she’d first purchased the wand from Ollivander’s, she’d slept with it under her pillow. Even during quidditch games, she keeps it strapped to her inner thigh – even though this is very much against the rules.

It’s not that she’s incapable of performing wandless magic, because if that were the case, she’d certainly be having a mental breakdown right about now. No, she simply prefers the comfort of casting with her wand. It’s far easier to channel your magic into an object than it is to allow it to flow freely through your body.

She tries to recall anything and everything her father had taught her about wandless magic.

“The magic lies within you, Cassie. Close your eyes and feel it. Allow it to flow through you like a river, the current carrying your spell towards your fingertips.”

She closes her eyes and focuses on her breathing, attempting to focus on the familiar ever-present tingle of magic within her. She pictures it like water, as her father suggested. She imagines this water flowing and ebbing through her veins, urging it to arrive at the tips of her fingers.

She envisions Hermione’s bluebell flames, her eyes remaining closed. It isn’t until she feels the heat that she allows her eyelids to flutter open, revealing a tiny, contained flame in the palm of her hand.

She smiles to herself, confident enough in her magic to know that she can exercise enough power over it to succeed.

Cassie glances around, realising for the first time that the arena is not at all what she had expected. She stands amongst familiar rolling green hills, a humid sort of chill in the air. A dark forest lays behind her, no doubt concealing a variety of horrors. But, as she looks around the circular space, she notices each contestant is surrounded by a unique environment.

To her left, Mei stands in a forest of thin green trees, a stream of some kind running afoot. To her right, Luiz stands in a rainforest, large leafy trees surrounding his podium. Across the arena, she can see the signs of snow-capped hills and sand-covered dunes.

Each contestant is playing with a home-field advantage, it seems.

She sees the sparks go off as if in slow-motion, each individual ember of magic cascading toward the earth once more. Without taking a second to come up with a plan, Cassie jumps off of her podium and runs into the forest behind her.

Lupin-Black Cottage

“No wands? Are they taking a piss? Is that even legal?” Sirius shouts at the projection in front of him.

Remus is more than thankful that he’d joined Sirius for this task, especially given the length of the whole ordeal.

“They’re kids! They need their bloody wands!” Sirius continues, anxiously pacing around the sofa.

“Pads, deep breaths. Cassie is fine without her wand,” Remus smiles, attempting to remain optimistic. Truthfully, he’s feeling just as nervous as his husband, but he’s also well aware of the fact that Sirius will become positively catatonic if he picks up on even the tiniest bit of worry from Remus.

As a general rule of thumb, Remus is a level-headed individual. He’s able to view his emotions logically, making sense of why he may be experiencing one in particular. Sirius has never seemed to acquire this skill, and for that reason, views Remus being worried as a sign that he should be *very* worried.

“Sirius, sit down,” Remus smiles, patting the sofa next to him.

But, it isn’t Sirius who joins him on the worn cushions, but a mangy old black dog. “Okay Pads,” Remus whispers, patting the dog lovingly on its head.

The Arena

For the better part of an hour, Cassie wanders aimlessly around the forest, desperately looking for any signs of a glowing orb. After no success whatsoever, she decides she should change regions – perhaps Scotland doesn’t contain an orb at all. Determined to make it out of this task with a clue, she makes a beeline for the centre of the arena.

Just before she steps out of the forest and into the rolling hills once more, a large womanly figure in a black cloak blocks her path. At first, she thinks it may be a dementor, causing her anxiety to spike as she worries about whether or not she’ll be able to wandlessly cast a Patronus charm.

But then she sees the gaunt green face of the creature. Cassie’s eyes blow wide, quickly waving her hands over her head to cast a bubble head charm.

A Banshee.

What on earth is the Department of Magical Games and Sports doing putting a Banshee of all things in an arena full of kids? Not only are they downright frightening in appearance, but their screams are fatal.

Fatal!

The witch wracks her brain for ways to defeat a Banshee. She has to admit that she hadn't been paying very close attention during that lesson—mostly because she assumed she would never cross paths with the dark creature.

She casts an *immobulus* on the creature, causing it to freeze in place. Then, without wasting another moment, a quick *stupify* to the chest. As the creature flies back into a tree, crumbling to the earth below, Cassie sucks in a sharp breath, surprised by the amount of power she'd been able to wield without her wand.

She takes off once more, emerging into the hills, the centre of the arena now in sight. But, just before she's about to step into neutral territory, she hears an ear-piercing feminine scream from behind her. Whipping around in freight, she attempts to decipher where the noise had come from.

There were only two people that could have made that scream, both of whom Cassie had grown quite fond of.

The witch runs back into the forest once more, her senses heightened by the adrenaline coursing through her veins. "Caitlyn?" she yells. "Mei?"

She hears the same scream once more, causing her to alter her direction to the west. "Caitlyn?" she screams back, her heart rate increasing with every second that passes.

She arrives in a small clearing and comes to a halt, her breath catching in her throat.

There, amongst the grass, is Caitlyn, curled in the fetal position.

"Caitlyn!" Cassie exclaims, running forward to the witch and throwing herself onto the ground next to her.

"Cait, Cait," she sobs, shaking the witch's body. "Cait, look at me," she whispers, wiping a stray tear from her face.

But when Caitlyn turns to face her, Cassie reels back, scrambling to get away from the girl.

Because all it took was a split second of Cassie's brown eyes connecting with Caitlyn's blue to know that *that* is not Caitlyn at all. The Boggart had been highly convincing. She can admit to that—but it hadn't managed to get the shade of blue quite right.

Caitlyn's blue reminds Cassie of the crystalline waters of the Dominican Republic, her favourite holiday to take with her fathers. It reminds her of the beach, of high tide just before breakfast.

She's always found great comfort when she looks into Caitlyn's eyes. Sometimes she swears she can see the water move and glimmer in the sunlight.

These eyes had been dull, stagnant.

"Ridikkulus," she spits, pointing her middle finger at the girl. The shape slowly shifts into a mangy black dog who begins to chase its tail with delight.

Cassie takes a moment to crouch down and hold her face in her palms. "Caitlyn is safe," she whispers to herself. "Mione is safe, Dad is safe, Father is safe."

Truthfully, Cassie wants to cry right then and there.

Because nothing scares Cassie – no beasts or curses. Nothing except for those she loves being in danger.

And somehow, this tournament has managed to bring forth the one thing she's afraid of.

She needs to find Caitlyn.

The Lupin-Black Cottage

Remus releases a long breath, one he hadn't even realised he was holding. A Banshee and a Boggart. Within ten minutes of each other.

Padfoot had started whimpering the moment the Banshee appeared and had only turned back into Sirius so that he might down half a bottle of firewhiskey.

"They're trying to kill our little girl Moony," Sirius wails, flinging open various cupboards in the kitchen with the flick of his wand. "I can't watch this!" he yells as he peeks his head around the corner to watch.

"I'm going to make her Banoffee Pie for after!" he declares. Sirius always has been a nervous baker.

As Remus watches his daughter crouched down on the ground, hands cupping her face, his heart aches. He wants nothing more than to pull his daughter into a hug and ruffle her hair the way he always has. He wants to whisper into her ear and assure her that everything will be alright.

But for now, he has to sit and wait.

The Arena

Taking in a deep breath, Cassie does what she always does when she needs to calm herself down. For a moment, she worries she won't be able to without her wand in hand. But, as the familiar sensation courses through her body, she smiles.

Because where Cassie sat not moments before, is now a small black cat.

Cassie hadn't been surprised by her animagus form in the slightest. She'd undergone the process at the age of twelve during her summer holidays, her Dad assisting her with each step along the way. It had been a long and arduous process, especially with how nervous Sirius had been regarding the transformation potentially going horribly wrong.

The worst part, of course, had been having to hold the leaf of a Mandrake in her mouth for an entire month. She had absolutely despised the taste of it. But, as she stirred its remains into the potion at the next full moon and began reciting the incantation *Amato Animo Animato Animagus*, she knew it had been worth it.

When the next lightning storm occurred, Cassie dutifully drank her potion under the supervision of her Dad, transforming suddenly into her animal self.

Now, she wonders why she hadn't transformed into her animagus form right off the bat for this task, finding navigating the arena to be much easier with her feline senses.

Generally, Cassie doesn't tell people about her animagus ability. She'd reluctantly registered herself as an animagus the year prior after much encouragement from her Father.

Cassie views her animagus as a part of her that is highly personal.

The goal of her transformation, of course, had been so that she could spend the full moons with her fathers, should she wish to. For the first eleven years of her life, a friend or family member would come to stay with the witch for the evening. Sometimes she would even visit the Burrow.

But, once she was able to safely transform into her feline form, the full moons become her favourite monthly occurrence.

While Remus dutifully drinks his Wolfsbane potion every month—meaning that he's able to keep his head whilst undergoing his transformation—he outright refused to allow Cassie around him in human form.

So, finally, on the August full moon before her return to Hogwarts for third year, Cassie joined her Fathers for her first-ever full moon.

It had made her both incredibly happy, and also terribly sad to see her Father shift before her. Remus Lupin is an exceedingly kind man, one who gives the best hugs, twists her hair into a plait, and always gives her extra chocolate after dinner.

But once a month, her Father became a being that Cassie had never fathomed before seeing with her own eyes. At first, she'd been frightened, her feline instincts telling her to get far, far away from the werewolf across from her.

But, as she sat and silently observed, her fear slowly dissipated, a hollow ache coming forth in its wake. She'd slowly approached her father and nudged his paw with her snout, purring as the werewolf gave her a gentle pat on the head.

The black cat approaches a small lake, one she hadn't noticed upon her first inspection of the area. She peers into the clear waters, lowering her snout to the surface.

There, at the bottom of the lake, is an unmistakable glow.

For a split second, she debates transforming back and jumping into the waters with reckless abandon. But, she quickly remembers Cormac McClaggen's words: "These clues are hidden, and protected."

No, retrieving this clue certainly won't be a simple feat. There's also the fact that once she retrieves it, she will have to keep it safe for the remaining four and a half hours. Perhaps it's best to leave it be, for now. It seems strategic to leave the clue, and fetch it closer to the end of the task.

Of course, someone may come along and take it.

She could stay.

But.

She really wants to find Caitlyn.

Plus, it would be safer to dive into the waters with someone keeping watch.

The Lupin-Black Cottage

“Okay, the pie is almost done!” Sirius declares, running a flour-covered hand through his long black hair. Tiny wisps of grey have formed at his roots, but Remus has opted to not point this out for the time being.

“What about some chocolate chip cookies?” Remus suggests.

“Good idea Moony!” Sirius smiles, sneaking a glance at the projection. “I’m glad she’s Lightfoot right now, calms my nerves.”

“Mine too,” Remus whispers. He was glad that Cassie hadn’t jumped into the water without taking a moment to weigh the pros and cons. This was one instance where he was very thankful that his daughter was a Slytherin, rather than a Gryffindor.

“You’ve got it, Cass,” he whispers to himself.

The Arena

A black cat weaves its way through the Bamboo forest of Japan with its snout to the ground. At first, she’d wanted to head straight to America in search of Caitlyn. But, something told her to venture to Japan instead. Call it a gut feeling, call it intuition, Cassie has learned to always trust this sensation.

The humid air fluffs her fur ever so slightly, a stark contrast to the air of Scotland. She picks up on Mei’s scent almost immediately, following a trail deep into the forest alongside the stream. After many minutes of searching, Cassie’s ears perk up, a thrashing sound emerging from ahead.

Taking off, the cat approaches the commotion and quickly transforms into her human self.

“Mei!” she yells, her voice stammering as her eyes fall on the water demon trying to pull Mei into the water with him.

“*A Kappa*,” Cassie whispers under her breath.

She can practically hear her father’s lecture on the demons. “*Known for strangling humans that invade their shallow ponds, Kappas – which resemble a scale-covered monkey with webbed hands – feed on human blood. One can protect themselves from, and appease a Kappa by throwing a cucumber inscribed with that person's name; however, you can also trick it into bowing, the water in its head, therefore, spilling out, weakening it as this is their source of strength. Kappa cares very much for politeness, so if a person makes a deep bow, it will return the gesture.*”

Cassie takes a deep breath and approaches the Kappa, clearing her throat to alert the demon to her presence. The minute its eyes find her, she begins to shake but she wills herself to remain calm. She bows her head deeply, hinging her hips to such an extent that her forehead is mere inches from the ground.

She keeps her eyes low, only looking up when she hears a loud *SPLASH* .

The moment the water spills out of the Kappa's head, its grip loosens from the witch's neck just enough that she can free herself. Mei snatches the glowing orb from the shallow waters behind the creature.

Without uttering a single word, the Japanese witch takes off at an alarmingly swift pace, Cassie following after her. Once they're far enough away from the creature to feel relatively safe, the pair collapse onto the ground, their chests heaving as they attempt to catch their breath.

"*Nantekotta,*" Mei breathes.

Cassie nods, remembering that Hermione's language spell only applied to the Hogwarts grounds.

"Thank you," Mei smiles.

"Of course."

"I did bow, but then I had to stand to get to the clue," the witch explains.

"I think it will be easier to retrieve the orbs as a team," Cassie adds.

"Do you have one?" Mei asks.

"Not yet, but I know where one is."

"Let's go," smiles Mei, eager to return the favour to her friend.

"I want to find Caitlyn," Cassie whispers. "A Kappa, a Banshee, a Boggart," the witch mutters, shocked at the type of creatures the Ministry had allowed to be put in the arena.

Mei nods in understanding.

"I think I can track her," Cassie continues, shifting into her cat form once more.

"You're an animagus?" Mei shrieks, bewildered. The cat meows and nods its head, leading the Japanese witch from the forest.

The Lupin-Black Cottage

"Moons, you can't lie, that thing looks like Walburga," Sirius laughs to himself, taking a large bite of a chocolate chip cookie.

"Sure Pads, if you say so," Remus smiles, thrilled that Sirius had imbibed enough liquor to calm down a tolerable amount. "I'm so proud of Cass."

"Me too Moony, she's far smarter than me." Sirius polishes off the cookie and places his hands on his hips. "But she needs to stop playing hero and grab a damn orb." Padfoot's attempt at a stern visage was markedly less intimidating when he had crumbs clinging to the corners of his mouth, but Remus kept that thought to himself.

"She was raised by a bunch of Gryffindors. She's going to play the damn hero, Pads."

The Arena

With two hours down and four to go, Cassie grows even more determined to locate Caitlyn. With her snout to the ground, she quickly locates the witch's scent, tracing it all the way from American territory to Brazil.

The lush forest is far more humid than the past two environments she'd been in, and her already fluffy fur becomes comically frazzled as a result. As they weave through the trees, Cassie remains impressed by how quiet Mei can be. In fact, she's certain that if she didn't have her feline hearing, she wouldn't be certain if the witch was behind her at all.

Cassie feels her whiskers twitch, causing her to come to an abrupt halt. Mei stills behind her, looking around with a worried expression.

Suddenly, a small green spirit appears before them, an arrow pointed in their direction. "Friend or foe?" it demands.

"Friend!" Mei replies quickly.

"And why should I trust you?" it demands.

"We're just looking for our friend. We don't want to disturb anything!"

"We?" the spirit asks, tilting its head to the side.

Cassie debates remaining silent but decides that honesty may be the best policy with this spirit. She dutifully transforms into her human form once more.

"A shifter!" the spirit declares, bowing deeply.

"Er, yes," Cassie nods.

"You may pass," the spirit smiles, disappearing into thin air.

Exhaling deeply, the pair continue further into the forest, Cassie shifting into her animagus form once more.

A few moments later, they hear a commotion ahead.

Cassie has no trouble identifying Luiz, who appears to be bartering with a small red-haired dwarf. The creature is unlike any dwarf that Mei or Cassie have ever seen – most notably because his feet face backwards relative to his body.

"Eu só preciso da pista!" Luiz exclaims, pointing at the nest behind the dwarf.

"Não, você não vai prejudicar o ninho!" the dwarf yells, pointing his spear at the wizard.

Cassie, hidden behind a large tree, looks around, unable and unwilling to keep her attention away from finding Caitlyn for too long. Her scent is strongest here, but as of right now, the witch in question remains elusive.

Suddenly, she feels a small tap on her back, and as she follows Mei's outstretched finger, her eyes land on Caitlyn, hiding up in a tree above the nest.

Cassie wracks her brain, attempting to come up with some semblance of a plan. She takes a moment to take a deepbreath, allowing the tightness in her chest to unravel. Caitlyn is safe, and that's what really matters. But – since they're here – they also need that clue.

In a flash, Cassie tiptoes through the trees, waiting until the very last second to transform back into her human form once she's behind the dwarf. She seizes the orb just as Luiz's eyes go wide, an accusatory finger pointed in her direction.

The dwarf notices his reaction immediately and whips around, throwing his spear in Cassie's direction. She ducks, the tip of the spear narrowly missing the top of her hair. Suddenly, a large glowing barrier is erected in front of her, and a very concerned Caitlyn drops out of the tree next to her.

"Come on," she whispers, taking off into the trees. The three girls run at a breakneck speed, eventually arriving in the centre of the arena. Caitlyn begins casting protective enchantments around them, releasing an exasperated sigh.

"I'm so glad you got it, Cass," she smiles. "I was up in that tree for over an hour debating how to grab it!"

"Here, it's yours," Cassie nods, thrusting the glowing orb in Caitlyn's direction.

"No, you got it, it's yours."

"Cait, don't be ridiculous!" Cassie seethes.

"No, you're being ridiculous!"

"How about we view it as a group clue?" Mei suggests, attempting to diffuse the tension. "We have two now. Let's find a third."

The two witches nod their heads, agreeing that working together does seem to bring forth the most success.

As they reach the halfway point, the witches return to Scotland, determined to retrieve the orb from the depths of the lake. They chat animatedly, laughing as they go. Cassie and Mei reenact their encounter with the Kappa, leaving Caitlyn with a horrified expression on her face.

Cassie also tells the tale of the Banshee in the woods but opts to leave her experience with the Boggart unspoken.

The three witches approach the lake and come to a screeching halt as they watch Nikolai of Durmstrang dive below the surface. Cassie lets out a groan at the sight, mentally kicking herself for leaving the orb for someone else to stumble upon.

But, a moment later, the three witches watch in awe as Nikolai is thrown from the water, landing at an awkward angle on the other side of the lake. Running over, Mei checks his pulse.

"He's alive," she nods, the group releasing a collective sigh of relief.

"What's protecting the clue?" Caitlyn asks, peering into the waters.

“I have a suspicion,” Cassie groans, throwing a large rock into the water.

A split second later, a large green horse-like creature jumps out of the lake in an arc, the water rippling to the edges of the lake and crashing into the shore.

“A Kelpie,” Cassie nods. “Known for luring unwary travellers into the water, and dragging them underwater and to eat them.”

“That’s pleasant,” Caitlyn nods.

“Apparently you can ride them,” Cassie suggests.

“You will do no such thing!” Caitlyn exclaims, horrified at the prospect of having to watch Cassie dragged beneath the surface.

“We don’t know where the other clues are!” Cassie argues. “We need this one.”

The Lupin-Black Cottage

“They bicker like an old married couple,” Remus observes. He had a sneaking suspicion that Cassie had been seeing someone as of late – watching her interact with the Ilvermorny witch had all but confirmed this suspicion.

“Do you think that they’re...?” Sirius asks.

“Together? Yes, it’s obvious,” Remus nods.

“I didn’t know Cass was into witches,” Sirius admits.

“No offence Pads, but are you blind?” Remus asks. He’d suspected as much for a few years now, though hadn’t brought this up with the witch because, frankly, it was none of his business. He knew she would tell them when she was ready.

“Well, she went to the Yule ball with that bloke,” Sirius argues.

“There’s such a thing as liking both.”

“Why didn’t she tell us?” Sirius asks, crestfallen.

“Maybe she assumed we knew,” Remus suggests.

“Well, I need to meet this witch!” Sirius declares. “What kind of pie do you think she likes? Americans like apple pie, right?”

Casting her second bubble head charm of the evening, Cassie dives beneath the surface of the lake. Almost immediately, she comes face to face with the Kelpie. Its glowing green eyes stare at her for a moment as if trying to understand why she would be so unintelligent to enter its domain.

Cassie remains still, waiting for the spirit to approach her. She knows that the moment she moves, it will charge, and that is exactly what she wants to avoid. So she waits, the Kelpie inching towards her with intense curiosity.

She takes deep breaths as it approaches her, its face mere inches from hers. Then, when it's so close that she feels like she may go cross-eyed, she reaches her hand forward and grabs ahold of one of the slimy strands of seaweed. Without waiting, she propels herself forward, grabbing onto three more strands.

Once on the back of the beast, she tugs on the strands as if they were reins, attempting to wrangle the spirit into submission. It bucks violently, coming to the surface of the lake. It contorts its body and spins beneath the waters again, and Cassie has to focus every ounce of her being on gripping the strands to not be sent flailing through the air toward the shore.

Out of the corner of her eye, she notices the green orb, so close, yet still out of reach. She remains patient, hoping that the beast will swim by the orb at some point, bringing her close enough so that she can grab it.

Sure enough, the Kelpie spins in that direction. When the orb is within arm's reach, Cassie reaches towards it, hand outstretched. But, the split second she removes her grip from the reins, the Kelpie jerks.

Suddenly, she's laying in a heap on the shore, two very concerned witches rushing towards her.

"Cass!" Caitlyn exclaims.

"I was SO CLOSE!" Cassie yells, exasperated. She stands and casts another bubble head charm, ready for round two.

"Sit down," Caitlyn demands. "Team effort, remember?" Without waiting for a reply, the witch casts her own bubblehead charm and jumps into the water. Cassie watches in horror as the water ripples, crashing into the shore.

After five minutes, she debates going under to join the witch. But, just as she's about to jump into the lake, Caitlyn comes soaring out of the water.

Cassie watches her land, the single moment passing in slow-motion. The angle at which Caitlyn lands is horrifying, her leg giving a resounding *crack* as she comes crashing into the ground. The witch screams as she grabs at her leg, Cassie and Mei rushing towards her.

Mei starts muttering various spells under her breath, dragging her hands overtop of Caitlyn's contorted leg. But the usual white glow of a healing spell never occurs.

Cassie tries next, uttering the few healing spells she knows of, with no success.

"I've never healed anyone without a wand," Mei admits.

"Me neither."

"Healing charms are very specific, especially with wand movements. I'm worried we won't be able to heal her fully," Mei whispers.

"Fuck."

"Just leave me," Caitlyn sobs. "You both have clues. I was never going to win this godforsaken championship anyway."

“Stop that!” Cassie exclaims. “I’m not abandoning you.”

“I think I can set the bone into place,” Mei says suddenly. “It’ll be enough to move you, but it won’t be healed.”

Both Cassie and Caitlyn nod, encouraging Mei to try. The witch closes her eyes and spreads her fingers, a warm pink glow surrounding each of the digits. She inhales deeply and lowers her hands towards Caitlyn’s limb, exhaling as the pink glow spreads across the leg. Caitlyn shivers in relief as the bone shifts into place.

“I know where another clue is,” Caitlyn admits.

The trio reluctantly make their way to America, Cassie and Mei acting as a support for Caitlyn.

“I haven’t actually seen an orb,” the witch admits. “But I saw a Thunderbird, and given that they’re an endangered species, I’m assuming they would have only brought one here if it was to protect a clue.”

“You’re probably right,” Cassie admits. “We know where three of the clues were, which leaves America, Bulgaria, Russia, Africa, and France as potential locations.”

Caitlyn points them toward an enormous cliff where she’d first spotted the Thunderbird. “I’m guessing the nest is up there,” she says, pointing at the top of the cliff. “Their habitats are usually found in elevated, hard-to-reach locations.”

Cassie approaches the wall and drags her hand across the stone. As she glances up, she realises that there are enough ridges in the rock for one to climb, should they wish.

Caitlyn is in no shape to climb, but she also refuses to leave her alone. She knows Caitlyn will try to stop her, but she also knows that she is the one that needs to do this.

Turning to Caitlyn, she tosses her glowing orb in her direction. Without waiting for a reply, Cassie begins to scale the cliff.

“I can make it!” she shouts.

The Lupin-Black Cottage

“Pads, tell me she isn’t climbing that thing,” Remus groans. Secretly, he’s never been a fan of heights, and the very idea of Cassie climbing to the top of the cliff with no support makes him feel viscerally ill.

“It’s too bad her animagus isn’t a bird,” Sirius adds, looking equally perturbed.

For the first time that evening, Remus grabs the bottle of firewhiskey from Sirius’s grip and takes a swig.

The Arena

When Cassie reaches the halfway point of the cliff, she makes the dumb decision to look back at the ground. Immediately she feels queasy, and her hands begin to shake.

“I can make it, I can make it,” she whispers to herself, forcing her body to continue to climb. Every inch of skin on her body is coated in sweat, and she has to fight the urge to reach a hand to her brow to wipe it away.

Though her body aches, she reaches the final stretch in a chorus of ‘ *I will make it, I will make it,* ’ before pulling herself over the edge to the top of the cliff.

She takes a moment to regain her composure, casting a cooling charm over her body and releasing a dramatic sigh.

But, of course, she notices a flash of movement that causes her to still. A few feet away is Aleksei, crouched in a bush, no doubt observing the Thunderbird perched happily in its nest. He looks at her with a murderous glare before pointing his finger in her direction.

Cassie casts a barrier immediately, his shoddy attempt at cursing her ricocheting off of her defence. He stands and marches towards her, cracking his knuckles and neck. Cassie sighs as she realises the Russian champion is no doubt intending to duel her, rather than ask for her assistance.

She readies herself in a defensive stance, though she feels slightly unprepared without the familiar sensation of her wand in hand.

Protego , she thinks the moment a purple spell comes towards her. The curse is deflected quite easily, allowing her just enough time to send a curse of her own in his direction.

The duel continues for the better part of ten minutes, both wielders exceptionally talented individuals. Cassie begins to grow tired, her body still aching from her ascent. But, she soon remembers another duel – one against her Potions professor. He’d poked into her mind ever-so-slightly, allowing him to hear her broadcasted thoughts.

With the small bit of energy that Cassie has left, she looks Aleksei dead in the eyes, continuing to cast various spells and defences without breaking eye contact.

She imagines his messy scrawl from the parchment he’s used to entering the tournament, focusing as much as she can on the muted brown of his irises.

Confringo.

Cassie doesn’t allow herself to ponder the word, to guess at whether or not she’d really seen the letters float across his eyes, or if she’d imagined them.

Instead of wasting time casting a barrier charm, she spins out of the way. For *Confringo* to be effective, it needs to come into direct contact with the intended victim.

Mid-spin, Cassie casts a well-aimed *Stupify* directly at the boy's chest, catching him off guard. “Prat,” she mutters as she watches him crumble to the ground.

Her victory is short-lived, however. She turns reluctantly to the Thunderbird, cursing the ministry for putting an endangered species in harm's way. She feels almost guilty performing a spell of any

kind and potentially harming the creature. Though, she supposes this could very well be why they'd selected this beast in particular. Empathy is an extremely effective deterrent to reaching the clue.

She decides to approach the bird slowly, allowing herself to admire the being as she does. Its head is similar to that of an eagle or Hippogriff, with three pairs of powerful wings adorning feathers that shimmer with cloud-like patterns.

The creature lifts its head to inspect her, tilting it from side to side. Cassie stills, not wanting to frighten the beast before necessary. She attempts to devise some kind of plan, one that would allow her to fetch the clue without harming the Thunderbird.

Unfortunately, the best she can come up with is simply stunning the creature.

The minute the spell comes into contact with its feathers, Cassie knows that this was the worst possible option she could have picked. Rather than the spell having its desired effect, it only aggravates the beast.

It takes to the air, flapping its six wings as it shrieks. The clouds behind the creature grow dark, rolling towards the cliffside as lightning cracks through the sky. Rain starts to beat down against the earth, and large drops of water crash into Cassie's face.

She squints, jumping back in shock as lightning strikes the ground not two feet from her.

"Cassie!" she hears suddenly, causing her to look up in shock.

There, in the sky, is a very large white dragon, Mei standing on its back. The witch holds onto the neck of the beast, guiding it towards the Thunderbird.

Cassie hasn't a clue where Mei managed to find a dragon, but she has to assume that it was perhaps in one of the other regions she had yet to explore.

"Get the orb!" the witch yells, inching her dragon closer to the Thunderbird. It turns to face the dragon with a shriek, and a bolt of lightning suddenly appears directly above Mei.

Without missing a beat, Mei steers the dragon out of harm's way, the Thunderbird following its new threat.

Cassie makes a beeline for the nest, quickly locating the orb and turning to the edge of the cliff. She stares at the ground below, her hands starting to shake at the prospect of having to climb down the side of the rock once more, this time in the pouring rain.

Just as she begins to climb, a flash of white appears before her. "Get on!" Mei yells.

Cassie doesn't need to be told twice and hurriedly jumps onto the back of the dragon.

The Lupin-Black Cottage

"Oh, Mione is going to love this!" Sirius exclaims as he watches his daughter hop onto the back of a dragon.

Remus cringes as he watches, not enjoying the split second Cassie is in midair.

“She got her clue!” Sirius cheers. “Our girl is going to win this whole damn Championship!”

The Arena

Cassie lands on the ground in the pouring rain, ready to rush towards Caitlyn and snog her senseless. She doesn't care that this is being broadcasted worldwide.

But, when she looks towards where she'd left the witch, her eyes grow wide.

There stands Aleksei with his arm firmly around Caitlyn's throat, his finger pointed at her temple.

“Give me the clue,” he spits, tightening his grip around Caitlyn's neck.

“Let her go!” Cassie yells, her heart breaking at the sight of Caitlyn in tears, her leg twisted at what looks to be an uncomfortable angle.

“Give me the clue,” he repeats.

A million thoughts cascade through Cassie's mind, each more ridiculous than the last.

But, one stands out. She sets the ball on the ground and rolls it toward him. She waits for him to release his grip on the witch, and when he does, she strikes.

A full bodybind curse goes shooting toward the wizard. But, he doesn't just freeze, because a red stupify comes shooting from behind her, causing him to fall limp onto the ground. Mei grins, nodding her head in Caitlyn's direction.

She rushes forward, scooping up the glowing orb as she goes. She falls onto the ground next to a sobbing Caitlyn, peppering kisses across her head. “It's okay, Cait, we did it, we did it,” she whispers, pulling the witch in towards her.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

When the Champions appear in the Great Hall, two Mediwitches rush forward, supporting Caitlyn as they lead her to the Infirmary.

Cassie crumples onto the floor, the sheer adrenaline of the past six hours causing her to crash. Two figures run towards her, throwing themselves onto the ground next to her.

“We are so proud of you, Cass,” Remus smiles.

“You were so brave,” Sirius beams, ruffling her hair.

Later that evening, Cassie, Sirius, and Remus gather around Caitlyn's bed in the infirmary, smiling as they enjoy both Banoffee and apple pie.

I hope you enjoyed the reveal of Cassie's animagus ability! From the beginning, I knew I wanted to include this, and I thought this was the best point to reveal it!

Also, you may have guessed, but this task was heavily inspired by the Hunger Games & the first task was inspired by the Maze Runner. Use this information as you will, you may be able to guess what the final task will be!

“Eu só preciso da pista!” = I just need the clue!

“Não, você não vai prejudicar o ninho!” = No, you won't harm the nest!

Greetings From Positano

Chapter Notes

This is a LONG 10k word chapter with approximately 7k words of plot and 3k words of smut. Also, there's some repetition from prior flashbacks in this chapter, but they're woven together so that we finally discover what went down in Oxford all those years ago !! I've been excited about this chapter for SO long, I really hope you enjoy it!

As always, beta love to whits_end ♥ & the ever-present support of callcalypso & likelyunfinished.

P.s. thank you for all of your comments & kudos - they mean the absolute world to me.

See chapter end notes for translations.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)



As Hermione and Draco land in the sparkling atrium of the Ministero della Magia Italiano (The Italian Ministry of Magic), they exchange a small smile with one another as the glow of their portkey fizzles out.

The fact that Professor Argo Pyrites conducted his research at the University of Naples felt like a divine intervention of sorts. The pair had always dreamed of visiting Italy together, and Positano in particular.

When Hermione suggested they visit Professor Pyrites, Draco assumed they would stay at the Zabini Estate in Tuscany, but Hermione argued that it made much more sense to stay closer to the University. Draco had relented, albeit reluctantly, allowing Hermione to arrange for their trip.

Draco wasn't sure what to expect of their accommodations. As a child, he'd only ever frequented his family's own estates across the continent: the Chalet in Switzerland, the Parisian Townhome, and the Austrian Castle.

Regardless of the destination, Draco isn't exactly familiar with other forms of accommodations. He'd been reluctant to ask too many questions about Hermione's plans, for he hadn't wanted her to think that he didn't trust her, or that he viewed her choices as somehow beneath him.

And so, as Hermione extends her hand towards Draco, he accepts without question, happy to follow the witch wherever she so pleases.

The pair land in front of a quaint hotel that Hermione had found in a brochure. She'd been eager to practise her Italian, but when the owner of the establishment had spoken on the other end of the phone, the witch had grown slightly anxious about the whole ordeal. She'd written out a script beforehand, but the woman hadn't followed her assigned lines, much to Hermione's dismay.

So, as they approach the small cluttered desk by the front entry, Hermione prays that the booking process had been successful.

"Ah, i giovani innamorati! Benvenuti!" the woman exclaims. Her rosy cheeks accentuate her welcoming smile as she extends her arms toward them.

"Ciao!" Hermione smiles. "Er-" she begins, attempting to remember the phrase she'd practiced no less than twelve times that morning. "Ho una prenotazione sotto Granger per la sera."

Draco nods, impressed. He very well could have taken over the communication for the sake of this encounter. He is fully fluent in Italian, after all. Many of his summers as a child had been spent at the Zabini estate, his mother claiming that she required the Italian summers to make up for the abysmal English winters. There, he and Blaise had learned the romance language from one of their favourite tutors, Giovanni.

But, he keeps his mouth shut – he quite enjoys witnessing Hermione make her attempts at speaking the language.

"Sì, eccoti qui. Stanza 3, appena salite le scale a sinistra," the woman smiles, thrusting a key in their direction and pointing towards the stairs.

"Erm, Grazie!" Hermione replies, accepting the ornate key with an outstretched hand.

Then, just because he can't help himself, Draco adds, "Grazie. Apprezziamo la vostra ospitalità."

Hermione's eyes go wide as his perfect pronunciation reaches her ears. "You speak Italian?" she asks, aghast.

"Sì, bellissima," he winks.

Hermione rolls her eyes but feels a blush spread across her cheeks nonetheless. She knows enough Italian to know that Draco had called her beautiful.

When the green door with the gold number three swings open, Draco and Hermione have two entirely different reactions. Draco's eyes light up like a first-year seeing the Firebolt 2600 for the first time, a grin spreading across his cheeks. Hermione, on the other hand, feels her breath grow short, and her pulse quickens.

Because where there should have been two separate single beds, there is one enormous bed.

While making the booking, Hermione hadn't wanted to presume that Draco would want to be intimate with her in that way. She herself also wasn't sure if she wanted to take that step – not yet, at least.

"Sorry, I did try to book two separate beds," she begins.

"You don't have to lie to me, Granger," Draco smirks, raising his eyebrows in unison.

"You heard me fumble my words down there. This was a mistake!" she replies, growing more flustered with every second that passes.

"Well, I'll have to thank the lovely hostess downstairs for this fortunate mistake," Draco declares, launching himself onto the bed. He stretches his legs out in front of him, kicking off his dragon-leather shoes and stretching his arms to rest behind his head. "Oh yes, this will do quite nicely," he smiles, closing his eyes for dramatic effect.

"We only have an hour until dinner with Professor Pyrites," Hermione begins.

"Yes, okay, Professor Granger," Draco smirks, his eyes still closed. "I'll be ready."

True to his word, Draco is dressed and ready to go approximately two minutes before their departure. Hermione, however, is not.

She taps her wand on her hair to no avail, the humidity of the Amalfi Coast rendering her usual attempts at taming her hair null and void. She lets out an exasperated sigh as she summons her beaded bag, riffling through it in search of her Sleekeazy's.

"How's the battle going in here, Granger?" Draco drawls, leaning up against the doorframe. He takes a moment to drink in the sight of the frazzled witch. He's always found it rather arousing to witness her when she's all hot and bothered, no matter the circumstances.

"I am losing if that wasn't already evident," she seethes.

"May I?" Draco asks, slowly moving towards her.

“What? You know beauty charms?” she laughs.

“Did you honestly think that my hair is always this perfectly imperfect without?” he retorts.

“You’re telling me that the boy who bullied me for my unruly hair was simply *projecting*?” she asks.

“Something like that,” he nods. “But I’ve always secretly liked your hair, you know that.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that you were a pot calling the kettle black,” she replies.

“Excuse me?” he asks, unfamiliar with the muggle expression.

“Nevermind. We’re going to be late,” Hermione frowns, crossing her arms across her chest.

Wordlessly, Draco casts a seamless beauty charm, one that causes Hermione’s curls to soften and the humidity-induced frizz disappears, the honey-brown tendrils smoothing and framing her face.

“For the record,” he whispers, bringing his mouth next to her ear, “you look beautiful with or without the charms.”

Hermione feels a shiver cascade down her spine as her eyes remain locked on his in the mirror before them. In that moment, she’s tempted to cancel dinner and launch herself toward the wizard standing behind her. But, she knows that this decision would be one rooted in lust, rather than logic – and Hermione has always been nothing if not logical.

Over the past few days, Hermione’s thoughts had begun to consume her once more. With this short trip on the horizon – a trip they had always discussed taking together – she’d grown nervous about where they were headed as a pair.

Neither of them had verbalised how they felt or attempted to put into words what had been transpiring between them. There’s this sort of mysterious air between them, causing them both to catch their breath every time they approach the possibility of crossing the invisible line that had been drawn between them.

Hermione still isn’t certain whether Draco views their relationship as a long-term endeavour, or simply a way to pass the time. For a while, she hadn’t minded how much was left unsaid between them. There had been a mutual understanding of sorts that passed between them, allowing them to simply enjoy each other’s company, rather than having to classify the actions that are taking place.

But, this uncertainty had created a feeling of uneasiness in Hermione’s gut, rather than the feeling of comfort she had become accustomed to. She stands on the precipice of two kinds of wanting.

Wanting to know what they are, what kind of future –if any– Draco envisions for them

But, simultaneously, Hermione finds herself wanting to remain just as they are. Because deep down, Hermione knows that if she asks him to classify what they are and to make his intentions clear, the conversation may leave her in absolute shambles, rather than the sense of relief she’s searching for.

And so, on the one hand, she can continue to enjoy his presence, his time, his affection, and everything else she’s somehow become re-accustomed to, or ask the question that’s been burning a hole at the back of her throat for many days now.

Because Hermione can already feel herself getting attached – far past the point of a casual relationship. She can feel herself falling into dangerous territory, arriving at the point of no return. And as she stares at the wizard's slate grey eyes, she realises that if she is to continue down this path and return to the comfort of intimacy with him once more, she would be opening herself up to the point of being hurt all over again.

Hermione is certain that he knows this as well because for the past few weeks they've both been drawing back from one another after every encounter at the very last moment, coming up for air while treading water before they drown entirely.

And if Hermione knows one thing for certain, it's that she can never have just casual sex with Draco Malfoy. Not again.

But, this situation, this relationship that's quickly growing and evolving between the two of them, has already moved far past the point of casual sex. In fact, Hermione knows it would be anything *but* casual.

Now, Hermione has nothing against casual sex. In fact, she's happily partaken in this very act on multiple occasions.

However, for casual sex to truly mean nothing to either party, there needs to be a certain level of emotional disconnect between the two people. This keeps the encounters fun and non-committal, meaning that none of those involved will leave with their feelings hurt because both people are completely aware of their absolute lack of emotional connection.

However, the opposite is true in this case, because Hermione feels as if she and Draco are more connected emotionally than in any other way. Because while she's certainly attracted to him physically, what she feels for him is so much more than that.

Hermione truly enjoys Draco's company, his presence, their silence, and their bickering. She knows, whether she likes to admit it to herself or not, that she can never have just casual sex with Draco.

And so, she fully intends to keep drawing the invisible line between them until he makes his intentions clear. Because she doesn't want to get her feelings hurt – not again –and allowing herself to fall into the abyss of the unknown is not something she plans on ever doing. Especially when it comes to Draco.

"Let's go," she smiles.

The pair arrives at a quaint little restaurant, one tucked off the end of a sidestreet, nestled between a deli and a men's clothing store. Dr. Pyrites had been adamant that it was the best authentic Italian food in the village, a fact that Draco was fully willing to debate should the occasion occur.

Draco takes a minute to "appreciate the view" before they enter, a convenient cover story to disguise the fact that he simply needs a moment to calm down before entering the restaurant. He feels betrayed by his own body for reacting in such a way, embarrassed even.

While he had intentionally walked a few steps behind Granger on the way over, wanting nothing more than to observe her rear end in the silk dress she'd chosen to wear, he hadn't realized his body would react so ... animatedly.

After thinking of various topics such as Professor Trelawny in the shower and his late godfather using a hula hoop, he nods, signalling to Hermione that he is satisfied with his perusal.

They weave through the close-knit tables, the dim lighting causing them to squint as they search for the professor. Draco walks with a purpose towards the table the moment he spots them, hell-bent on acting like a gentleman this evening.

He does typically try to act in a chivalrous fashion, especially when it comes to Granger, but he wants tonight to go perfectly for a different reason entirely.

Tonight, Draco fully intends on making his intentions clear. He'd rehearsed his speech with his mind healer many times, and remained determined that this weekend trip is just the place to make things official.

He and Granger had long dreamed of this very place together, all because of a postcard that was once delivered to his flat by accident.

January 4, 2001, King Street, Oxford

"Martha, there's a postcard here for you," Hermione smiles the minute Draco swings his door open.

"Granger, last night is all the proof I need to know that you're very aware of the fact that isn't my name," Draco smirks in reply.

"Yes, well, this was out here, addressed to Martha," the witch replies, pushing past him and flopping down onto his sofa. She tries but fails to hide the blush that spread across her cheeks at the reminder of the evening prior.

"Ah yes, from Terry and Josie wishing her well from Positano, Italy."

"It's a shame Martha doesn't live here anymore," Hermione frowns.

"Well, it's a lovely photo," Draco adds, thrusting the postcard toward her.

"I've always wanted to go to the Amalfi Coast," Hermione smiles.

"Myself as well, we'll have to go together I suppose," Draco replies in a very matter-of-fact tone. Truthfully, Draco had never even spared this location so much as a thought, but now that he knows Hermione wishes to visit, the Amalfi Coast seems like a lovely holiday destination.

"It's a date then," Hermione grins.

March 3, 2007, Positano, Italy

"Ah, there you are!" Dr. Pyrites exclaims, standing to greet the pair. He shakes Draco's hand with a firm grip before pulling him into a surprisingly tight hug. "You remind me so much of your mother, dear boy!"

Draco finds himself blushing at this comparison. He's fairly certain that he's never been compared to his mother before this exact moment. Everyone always feels the need to comment on his likeness

to his father, and while these comments are appreciated, he quite likes the feeling of pride that comes with being compared to Narcissa Malfoy.

“And my dear Hermione!” Pyrites smiles, placing two extravagant kisses on her cheeks. “Come, come, I’ve already ordered wine for the table.”

Draco quickly pulls Hermione’s chair out in front of her, gesturing for her to take her seat.

Hermione giggles at the sight, wondering why on earth Draco is acting like her butler.

After exchanging various pleasantries, and listening to more stories of Pyrites’ time at Hogwarts than Hermione was keen on, the food arrives.

Hermione had ordered the Filetto di Pomodoro, a simple pasta dish with very few ingredients comprising thinly sliced Roma tomatoes, tomato paste, garlic, chilli flakes, olive oil, and fresh basil.

Draco had opted for a Pizza al Taglio With Onion and Provolone. Hermione giggled as she watched Draco battle with himself internally, debating whether or not this was the sort of establishment where one is expected to eat their pizza with their utensils. In the end, his pureblood upbringing wins out, and he eagerly cuts into his first slice.

After their plates have been cleared, and two bottles of wine have been polished off, Pyrites removes a stack of papers from his satchel.

“I finally found my notes from my first round of trials over ten years ago,” he begins. “I haven’t managed to conduct anymore, seeing as it’s very difficult to find willing test subjects.”

Hermione nods. She’d assumed as much. Lycanthropy was a multifaceted, complex condition. Many of those living with lycanthropy hide this aspect of themselves away, fearing ostracization. It would be extremely unlikely that one of them would simply offer themselves up for clinical trials, especially given all the risks associated with the procedure.

“I have someone in mind who may be willing to go through the trials once we’ve reached a certain level of certainty regarding the process,” she smiles.

“And I take it you have some thoughts regarding said process?” the Professor asks.

“Malfoy and I came up with a few hypotheses,” Hermione begins, looking to the wizard to her left for reassurance. He offers her a kind smile, urging her to continue. Draco has absolutely no plans to step in this evening, quite content to observe Hermione do what she does best.

“We believe that the treatment for lycanthropy may be a combination of an alchemical ritual and a potion. As you know, the Wolfsbane potion, while effective, only treats the symptoms, not the root cause of the symptoms,” she explains. “The combination, however, may discern the root cause.”

“That is a fascinating hypothesis,” the man nods, dabbing his napkin at the corner of his mouth. “But what about the potency of the aconite?” he asks.

Hermione nods eagerly, “I’m glad you asked. Malfoy actually suggested changing the ratios of the Valerian Root and Lavender when I brought up that exact concern.”

“Ah yes, to counteract the possibility of aconite poisoning,” the professor nods. “And what ritual did you have in mind?”

“Truthfully,” Hermione starts, picking at her nail beds, slightly weary of the suggestion, “I think we may have to come up with one of our own.”

The professor’s eyes go wide at this. “Rather ambitious, don’t you think?”

“I’ve always considered myself to be ambitious,” Hermione replies simply. “There is, of course, the ancient Egyptian Alchemical ritual based on their observations of the lunar cycle, as well as the astrological patterns. They believed the lunar phase impacted the outcome of alchemical rituals, most notably the act of transmutation – which we now know to be true.”

The professor nods. “And you’re supposing that this may not be enough?”

“I don’t believe so,” she replies, hesitating for a moment.

“It was your publication, actually, that got me thinking. *All those infected are linked through Lycaon, the son of Pelasgus, who angered the god Zeus when he served him a meal made from the remains of a sacrificed boy. As punishment, the enraged Zeus turned Lycaon and his sons into wolves,*” she cites from memory. “What if the cure is perhaps somehow related to Zeus?”

Draco finds himself unable to wipe the smile off of his face for the entire walk back to their hotel. Hermione’s cheeks are flushed from the wine she’d consumed throughout the meal, as well as the adrenaline she’d felt from discussing their hypotheses with the Professor.

Draco has seen Granger look positively breathtaking on many occasions throughout the years, but as he observes the way the light of the moon reflects against her freckled skin, he’s convinced that he can see her magic surrounding her. He tries to find the words to describe the way she looks, but none of them seem to fully encompass what he wants to convey.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Draco understands why poetry exists. Because no single word can properly encapsulate the way he feels as he stares at the woman before him. No, it would take many lines, metaphors, and stanzas to even attempt to describe such a thing.

As someone who feels the need to always be talking and filling the silence, Hermione enjoys being in Draco’s presence, content with the silence that surrounds them. Something about Draco has always made her brain feel calm, as if she’s able to release a breath that she’s been holding for far too long and finally coming up for air.

But, in this instance, Hermione finds herself wanting to break the silence more than ever. She wants to ask him all the questions that have been swarming her thoughts and beg him to make his intentions clear.

But, no matter how many times she opens her mouth, she can’t seem to speak the words she so desperately wants to.

She supposes this is likely because she doesn’t want a repeat of the outcome of this exact conversation.

May 23, 2001, King Street, Oxford

Hermione lies tangled amongst Draco's limbs, a pale stream of moonlight peaking through the window behind them. A cool breeze of the beginnings of summer floats through the room, causing the candles on the bedside table to flicker.

She feels her heartbeat quicken as she opens her mouth, already upset with herself for ruining this perfectly wonderful moment.

"What are we doing?" she asks in a small voice.

"What do you mean?" he asks in return, his voice ripe with concern.

"Are we together, or are we just messing around?" she elaborates, forcing the words out of her mouth despite the taste of poison they leave on her tongue. There's a pause, the air between them growing thick.

"I'm not really sure what we're doing, Granger," he states.

"Are you actually interested in me?" Hermione asks, her eyes avoiding his stare.

"Yes, of course I am. Why else would I have invited you into my bed?" he quips, trying to lighten the conversation.

Hermione's tone remains serious. "So, are we working towards an actual relationship, or?"

Draco is silent, even the rise and fall of his chest beneath her head slowing. Truthfully, he wants nothing more than to open his heart to the witch and spill all his deepest, darkest secrets. He wants to beg for her to have him, to hold on to him a little longer. He wants to stay within the small radius of their current existence forever. He wants to pull her closer and tell her all the things he feels about her.

But, despite wanting to say these things, he finds the words are unable to form on his lips.

Draco knows Hermione deserves far more than what he can give her. He knows she deserves the world, someone who is her equal, who worships the very ground she walks on. Draco knows in his heart that Hermione Granger deserves far more than a man who used to wear the symbol of her oppressor on his forearm, a man who taunted her for years.

So, instead of saying all the things he wishes he could, Draco replies, "I don't know, Granger."

May 24, 2001, Grandpont Nature Park, Oxford

The pair make their way to their usual spot in the park. Draco wordlessly lays their blue knit blanket on the grass and takes a seat with a grimace. After last night's conversation, or lack thereof, Draco is well aware of the direction of this evening.

They pass a bottle of elf wine between them, both laying back and staring at the stars above them as they take turns taking large swigs of the liquid.

"I got an owl from the Ministry today," Hermione says suddenly, breaking the silence.

“Oh?”

“Offering me a position in the department of my choosing,” She adds, rolling her eyes.

“Granger, I’m sure the Ministry will roll over and offer to perform tricks if it means you’ll take on a position,” he laughs, taking another swig of wine.

She remains incredibly silent, something that has always frightened Draco. He likes her incessant chatter, the way her mind never seems to stop, finding it calming, almost soothing.

“Can I tell you a secret?” she asks.

He stares in her direction, though his eyes are filled to the brim with kindness, rather than judgement, something Hermione had struggled to distinguish at first.

Hermione feels safe when she’s in his presence, especially on nights like this when it’s only them and the stars.

“I don’t ever want to work for the ministry,” she whispers.

“Me neither,” he whispers back, quickly realising that this is the first time he’s ever admitted to this out loud. It had always been assumed that he would take over the Malfoy seat on the Wizengamot, or perhaps lobbying amongst various departments. But, if he’s honest with himself, he’s never wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps.

She turns to face him, shifting the blanket underneath them ever so slightly. “But I don’t know what else there is to do,” she begins before taking a deep breath. “Can I tell you my deepest, darkest secret?”

“If you’re going to confess your love to me, Granger-” he begins, but she cuts him off.

“I’m not joking right now, Malfoy.”

Draco finds that this sends a slight sting through his heart, but he blames it on the elf wine.

“Okay, yes, divulge all your secrets to me, oh Golden Girl,” he replies, hoisting the bottle into the air with a tone of sarcasm only he seems to be able to wield so effectively.

She stares up at the sky, her eyes tracking from one constellation to the next. She finds peace when she locates the one she’d been looking for.

“Sometimes I dream of just leaving the wizarding world behind, and becoming a muggle once more,” she whispers, her voice so quiet that it takes Draco a moment to parse the sounds together and decipher their meaning.

“Really?” he asks.

“I think I have accomplished all I was meant to,” she adds.

“Granger, that is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard,” he replies simply. At that moment, he thinks that her opinion on the matter is one of the worst takes he’s ever heard. “And here I was thinking that you’re the Brightest Witch of our Age, or whatever the prophet is calling you these days.”

“It’s hard Malfoy, knowing that you peaked at age eighteen,” she explains.

“You seem to think that a peak is merely a stop on your journey, rather than the location you’re meant to remain.”

She stares at him, her mind evidently pondering the words he had spoken.

“You’ve earned your place at the top Granger. Now all that’s expected of you is to enjoy it.”

“You know I can’t just do nothing-” she begins, but he cuts her off.

“I don’t mean to suggest that you sit back and do nothing, Granger, I know you better than that.”

A smile tugs at her lips.

“I mean that now you can do absolutely whatever you want, you mustn’t consider what other people expect you to do.”

She nods slowly, understanding.

“If you could do anything in the world, Granger, what would it be?”

“I have no idea, honestly.”

“Do you want my opinion?” he asks.

“I thought I wasn’t supposed to consider the opinions of others,” she jests.

“My opinion is another matter entirely, thank you very much,” he smirks, but Hermione knows it’s one of playfulness, one she rather enjoys being on the receiving end of.

“Okay Malfoy, what would you have me do?” she asks.

“I always figured you’d return to Hogwarts, to teach.”

Malfoy had indeed thought such a thing for quite a few years now. The first time he’d thought it had probably been in their fourth year when he’d noticed her essentially teaching Potter three years’ worth of curriculum every night to prepare for the Triwizard Tournament. Then, again in their eighth year, when she’d taken the time to teach him to conjure a Patronus.

“Really?” she asks, her tone one of surprise.

“Have you honestly never considered it?”

“I can’t say I have.”

Hermione had given little thought to her future at all. Her entire existence up until very recently had been about keeping Harry alive, taking each day one at a time. Now that her every waking breath wasn’t filled with a feeling of imminent danger, she realised she had no idea what was to come next.

She allows her mind to wander, picturing herself in front of a class of young children, perhaps explaining Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration. She pictures herself at the staff table and

glancing at the seat next to her, Malfoy smiling back.

She catches herself, pulling her train of thought to a halt. Malfoy?

“You would be a brilliant teacher too,” she adds suddenly.

“Me?” he laughs. “Granger, can you imagine me being in charge of small children?”

“Yes, actually, I can.”

Now it’s Draco’s turn to ponder this possibility. He had plans to open an apothecary with Theo in a few months’ time. He’d already acquired the storefront in Diagon Alley and begun to outsource the harder-to-come-by ingredients. But truthfully, teaching at Hogwarts had never been a possibility he’d considered. He doubted McGonagall would even hire him.

“Maybe someday, Granger,” he replies simply.

“Yeah, maybe someday.”

He thinks of the owl he’d received from his mother a few hours prior, one that had caused his stomach to drop.

It had been an impulsive decision to owl Narcissa in the early hours of the morning, informing her of his intent to return to Wiltshire and enter society as a bachelor.

He knows it was a cowardly decision – to back out of whatever this was with Hermione and fall into the role that had been intended for him since his birth.

He desperately wishes he had an ounce of Gryffindor courage at his disposal, but unfortunately, Draco was no lion. The possibility of love, of both giving and receiving it, frightened him to no end.

His mother, all too eager to see her only son wedded and happy, had owled back with *exciting news*. Astoria Greengrass was happy to adhere to their original betrothal agreement - the one Draco had asked to be called off.

And so, the wizard stares at the stars above him, attempting to summon the courage needed to speak the words he knows he must.

But the witch beats him to it.

“I may go to America, and do another Mastery,” she says, turning to face him.

“In what?” he asks, quite relieved that she has been the one to break the silence. They both know this evening is goodbye, the last night they will spend together in Oxford.

He is not so naïve to think that whatever sanctuary they have formed within the borders of the ancient city will continue once they part ways. He knows that once they no longer have the alchemy lab as a reason to pull them together, his role in her life will ultimately cease to exist.

By now, Draco has tried to reach a kind of peace with this reality.

But truthfully, he believes nothing has changed him more as a person than in the past two years with Granger. Not the war, not playing a part in the death of Albus Dumbledore, and not watching his mother tortured before his very eyes.

No, spending two years in the company of the Wizarding World's Golden Girl has transformed him completely, forcing him to become a man almost unrecognisable from the boy he had once been.

He believes that each and every particle of his being has been altered. It reminds him of the ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus' paradox – the thought experiment that raises the question of whether an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object.

He thinks of himself in such a way. He is still the same man, Draco Lucius Malfoy, yet the Draco he sees in the mirror is another being entirely from the one he had been when he'd first arrived in Oxford.

“Charms, I think.”

He nods at this. That is a logical next step. She had always been the best in their year at charms, the first to master the levitation spell, and every single charm that was taught after that.

“It's what I want to do,” she adds, referencing their earlier conversation.

“Then that is what you should do,” he smiles. “You deserve to be happy.”

“Maybe you can come to visit,” she suggests, her eyes filled with hope.

Draco remains silent, allowing the possibilities of his existence to play through his head.

He realises at that moment that while he's excellent at giving advice, he often fails to take to heart the words he speaks. He knows exactly what he wants, yet he doesn't believe he is worthy of going after it.

“Granger,” he begins, turning his body completely so that he's laying on his side. Their faces are mere inches apart. He stares into her eyes, the gold specks he's acquainted himself with staring back at him.

“I'm to marry Astoria Greengrass once I return to Wiltshire,” he murmurs.

Hermione looks confused by this, her expression then shifting to one of almost anger.

“Why?” she asks with little inflection.

Draco cringes at her tone, one laced with threads of hurt.

“It's what I am meant to do,” he replies as honestly as he can manage.

“And will this make you happy?” she asks, unable to keep the incredulity out of her tone.

Draco sighs, unsurprised that the witch would use his own words against him.

“I'll be happy enough.”

May 25, 2001, King Street, Oxford

When Draco awakens the next morning, all he can feel is the overwhelming sensation of dread in his chest. He groans, forcing himself out of the sanctuary of his bed, and slowly making his way to the door.

He tells himself that if she's still there, he'll tell her the truth, that he'll take back everything he said the night prior. He'll get down on the ground and beg – beg for her to stay with him.

Hastily, he crosses the hall, knocking on the door with the back of his fist.

But there's no answer.

With a light push, the doorway swings open, and he peers inside.

Every bit of Hermione that had existed within those walls is gone – erased from existence. It's as if she was never there at all.

No stacks of books or potted plants. No green couch, or yoga mat on the floor.

Nothing.

And so, Draco makes his way across the hall to his flat for the last time, trying to find solace in the fact that he knows Hermione Granger is far better off without him.

March 3, 2007, Positano, Italy

As the pair enters the modest hotel, Hermione stumbles up the short staircase, falling into Draco's grasp. "Careful, love," he whispers, helping her to stand once more.

She scolds herself internally, still working out the words she wishes to say to him. Because she knows that tonight is a turning point for them. She isn't sure what direction they're headed, but she is certain that they're at a crossroads.

Hermione knows the evening is leading toward the irrevocable steps of intimacy. It's the perfect storm – the romantic dinner, the wine, the location, and their shared bed. But she outright refuses to be intimate with the blonde brat currently behind her, unless she is absolutely positive that he wants to be with her.

Properly.

The door swings open and she opens her mouth to speak, ready to spew whatever nonsense comes to mind.

But before she can, Draco shuts the door and turns towards her, his lips pursed, eyes swimming with thoughts. "Granger, I have something to say, if that's okay," he starts.

Hermione raises her eyebrow at him, encouraging him to continue. "And please just let me say it all before you respond because if I don't say it all now I never will," he continues, his voice quick, as if he's trying to catch his breath.

Hermione nods in agreement as she stares in his direction, growing worried in anticipation of what he will say that warrants such an introduction.

“I have been in shambles these past few years, Hermione. Ever since we went our separate ways,” he begins. Hermione feels her breath hitch.

She certainly hadn’t been expecting this. It’s almost as if he read her mind.

She worries momentarily that he had.

But no, surely not. She’d always been able to tell when Draco entered her mind.

“I’ve been so angry with myself, for letting you go, for not allowing myself to do exactly as I wanted to, needed to,” he continues. Hermione’s expression shifts to one of bewilderment, though she bites her tongue, respecting his wish for silence.

Draco notices her reaction. “Do not pretend as if you are unaware of the effects you have on me, have on everyone. You’re too smart for that.”

Hermione’s heart stutters, confused. She leans against the small wooden desk behind her, knowing that she should steady herself for whatever conversation they’re about to have.

“You are far too good for me, Granger, and I’m not saying this as some kind of excuse. I mean it, truly and honestly. You deserve the world, Hermione. In Oxford, fear blinded me. Fear of loving, being loved.”

He hesitates, taking a deep breath. “I don’t know how to love, Hermione. I don’t know how to show love. I never have. And you are worth so much more than that. I want to be someone who can love you properly – how you deserve to be loved. At the time, I didn’t think I was capable of that. But, being without you all these years made me realise I want to try. I want to do my best. I want to learn how to love you.”

He walks slowly towards her, placing his palms on the wooden surface behind her, his eyes never leaving her face. He pauses for a moment, his thoughts turning inward for a split second, as if second-guessing what he’s about to say.

“I was scared. Scared to make a decision, because neither option felt right. I am anything but special. I am exceptionally average.” He pauses again, taking a deep inhale, his eyes filled to the brim with anguish.

Hermione wonders what his definition of love is – why he thinks this would matter to her.

“My entire life, I was happy to breeze by, knowing that I didn’t have to work for anything, that I would be fine. But because of this,” he inhales, briefly shutting his eyes. “My existence was devoid of happiness, of anything fulfilling. And it took you coming into my life to see my life for what it really was. I wasn’t living, just existing.”

Hermione feels as if her heart may explode, wanting nothing more than to pull him into a hug.

“Growing closer to you, that was the first time in my life that I ever felt alive. And that sounds barmy, but I mean it. It was the feeling I sought for so long through unfavourable means. You are

that feeling. Everything about you sets my soul on fire. You're intoxicating to me in the best way, Hermione. And I wanted to hold on to that feeling forever—you forever."

Hermione stares at him, her face completely transparent, a window into her soul. She wants him to see that she feels the same, that she's felt as if her very existence dimmed significantly without him in it.

"But, in Oxford, it was an impossible choice. Because I am not worthy of you, Hermione, no matter how much I crave you."

He takes a step back, his brow furrowed as he continues. "And I worry that your feelings for me have long faded, and my chance is lost, but I had to tell you. I want you to know just how badly I wanted you – want you. I've never been good at expressing myself, but I'm trying Hermione because I don't care if I make a fool of myself. I need you to know."

Hermione bites her tongue, wanting nothing more than to allow countless words to spill from her mouth – words of love, adoration, and acceptance. The words he's speaking are ones she has dreamed of for years, deeming them as fantasy and nothing else. Her lip quivers as she holds her breath.

"And I promise you, I will leave you be. Should you wish it, I will never mention this again. But I can't go on with the possibility of you thinking that I felt nothing for you. I've felt something for you since the first time I saw you, Hermione. This feeling, the way I feel in your presence, I want that feeling forever, but more than that, I want *you*. The person you make me, the way you fill me with light, means more to me than you'll ever know."

Hermione feels breathless at his declaration, allowing herself a moment of bewilderment for his words to wash over her.

"As it stands, I am a reformed prick, one seemingly incapable of feeling a full range of human emotions," he motions to himself as if to exemplify his point.

"I truly bring very little to the table, but if you'll have me, I would gladly accept that reality, if it means that I get to hold on to you, at least a little longer. I will do whatever it takes to make this work, to be worthy of you, to learn to give and receive love, if you'll have me."

Hermione stares at him dumbfounded, rendered completely at a loss for words for perhaps the first time in her life. Two small tears make their way down her cheek as she nods her head quickly.

"Draco," she starts, reaching her hand towards him, "I don't need you to be anything more than exactly what you are now."

His eyes widen in surprise as if he honestly hadn't been expecting her to still feel this way towards him. Hermione can see his mind wander, attempting to make sense of everything, inevitably running through hundreds of words and moments, patching them together.

Hermione laces their fingers together as he stares down at her, silver pools of light beckoning her forward. The tips of their noses touch, their faces blurring the closer they become.

"Tell me what you want," she breathes. At first, his expression is one of confusion, but she witnesses the shift towards lust within seconds.

“You.”

“You already have me,” Hermione beams. She leans forward to plant a kiss on his lips, both her heart and soul craving nothing more than the sensation of his skin against hers. The moment their lips come to touch, Draco pulls away, causing her to panic, wondering if perhaps she’d misunderstood the situation.

But before her mind can wander too far, Draco is picking her up as if she’s weightless and setting her on the desk. She grins at him, more than happy with the direction they’re headed. She opens her mouth to tell him as much, but is silenced by his lips on hers once more.

He cups her face in his hands, his thumbs dancing across her flushed skin, his fingers grazing her jaw. Her legs are pushed open, his body hastily filling the space as if any vacancy between them is far too much to bear. His presence overwhelms her senses, his minty smell, his soft skin, and his muscular frame pressed against her body. She can feel a steady pulse of want growing just beneath her navel, spreading out towards her legs.

Hermione wraps her arms around his shoulders, pulling his neck towards her, earning a quiet groan from the back of his throat. Their kisses turn into smiles as they stare down at one another. She wraps her legs around his back as if to assure him she intends to remain in his embrace for as long as he’ll allow it.

Draco’s eyes never leave hers as his thumb traces along her bottom lip, dragging it down and allowing it to snap back into place. His face shifts into a look of longing, with perhaps a hint of lust, causing Hermione to feel emboldened, almost powerful.

His hands tangle in her hair, but this seems to only push him forward, his kisses becoming more intense as he whispers words she can’t quite make out in between each touch. Before she can overthink herself out of it, Hermione reaches her palm downwards, towards his leather belt and fumbles with the buckle. He stops suddenly, burying his head into the nape of her neck and breathing deeply.

Hermione manages to unclasp the buckle and shifts towards him, his breath growing laboured and heavy. “Draco?” she manages to say in between kisses.

“Hm?” he mumbles, his lips remaining on her neck, nipping and kissing at the spot where her jaw meets her neck.

Hermione’s eyes fall closed as he grips her closer. “Let’s lay down,” she breathes. That’s all it takes for him to freeze, pulling back to look into her eyes. His lips are parted, already red and swollen. He hesitates for a second, eyes locked with hers, as if trying to read her mind.

A smile creeps its way across his face. “Are you sure?” he asks, voice low. In response, Hermione leans towards him, kissing him along his neck and jaw. A low groan rumbles in his throat in response as he picks her up, rather enjoying the excuse to grab her arse.

He carries her towards the bed and stops as he reaches the edge, lowering her to the mattress. She moves her hands towards the waistband of his pants, pulling the fabric of his shirt out and fumbling with the buckle once more. He kisses her all the while, one hand supporting her neck as he hovers over top of the witch.

His shirt falls open, revealing his warm chest, faded scars spreading from his abdomen to his shoulders. Hermione pauses her tirade for a moment, tracing her finger delicately over the path of the scar. “Beautiful,” she whispers.

His arms circle her waist as he pulls her closer, clinging to her as if worried she may fade into nothingness before his very eyes. Her fingers glide through his hair, pulling his head forward to meet hers. Kissing her back with fervent need, Draco’s heartbeat increases with every moment that he remains entwined amongst her limbs.

She pulls back for a moment. “Are you sure?” she asks.

“Granger, I think you’re the only thing in my life that I’ve ever been sure of,” he replies with a sheepish smile. He tightens his grip on her back—he’d be damned if he let his witch out of his grasp ever again.

All these years, he’d been living with an inconsolable feeling of longing in his gut, one that brought him to the precipice of insanity more times than not. Feeling Hermione’s body pressed against his is enough to render him breathless, elated and desperate for more.

His hands wrap around the back of her neck, drawing her back to him as his thumb traces circles on the exposed skin. His lips meet hers and she releases a breathy sort of sigh, a sound that Draco wishes he could bottle and consume until he grows delirious.

He opens his mouth ever so slightly, allowing her tongue to sneak past his teeth. He can feel her grin as she explores, deepening the kiss, wanting more.

He can feel her breasts pressed against his bare chest as she arches into him, tilting her head back as if in invitation. Their hips collide, causing Draco to groan in response.

“Draco...” she sighs, gently digging her fingers into his back. The sound of his name on her lips only encourages him, all the hesitancy and restraint he’d had at his disposal ceasing to exist.

She whimpers as she pushes her hips forward and rolls them against his erection.

“Fuck, Granger,” Draco breathes as he looks down at her. He’d seen her like this before, her curls splayed across the pillow, her cheeks flushed. But, as of late, this sight had been restricted to his dreams rather than reality.

Leaning down, he trails his fingers gently up the exposed skin of her arm, allowing his gaze to explore the witch beneath him. He’s been yearning for this moment for far too long, and he certainly intends to savour it.

He guides the thin straps of her dress off of her shoulders, smiling when he notices the way gooseflesh appears wherever his fingers come into contact with her.

Hermione arches her back off of the bed, wordlessly urging him to slide her dress off of her. Draco feels himself grow even more aroused at the sight. Without missing a beat, he slides the silk of her dress off of her body, navigating it over her curves before tossing it onto the floor next to the bed.

He peppers kisses along her stomach and up her ribcage, filling his palm with one of her breasts. She presses into his touch as his mouth finds its way to her breast, licking and nipping at the skin as she releases another breathy moan.

His length pulses against her hip, a ragged breath escaping his lips as he stares down at her. He feels himself grow ravenous, a man starved after years of dreaming of this very moment.

Merlin, she's beautiful, he thinks to himself. In another life, perhaps he would take an hour—or two, or three—just to worship her, appreciating every inch of her body and soul. But, in this life, the witch continues to move her hips against him, and he knows that there will be no time for such worshipping.

He reaches around her back, and without thinking, Hermione arches her back in response, pressing her breasts towards his face, desperate for him to touch her in any way he so desires. She bends one of her knees, creating an opening for him to slide closer to her, his erection straining against the thin layer of fabric separating them from one another. He snaps his hips forward, releasing a muffled groan into the nape of her neck as she rolls against him in turn.

Draco feels his heart physically ache at the feeling of his skin against hers. A pure and unadulterated euphoria courses through his veins as he kisses her.

Both are certain that time has come to a stop just for them, allowing for their hands and mouths to explore one another suspended between two moments, the earth's spin coming to a halt as they experience the sensations they'd been yearning for since they last parted ways.

Desperate to rid himself of the barrier between them, Draco wandlessly banishes his trousers as he slowly lowers himself down her legs, kissing her inner thighs and drawing runes against her skin as he goes.

Hermione feels her breath catch in her throat as she lifts her head off of the bed to watch him. Draco presses a delicate kiss to each of her hip bones, looking up at her with rapt attention.

"Please," she whispers, attempting to give him the explicit permission she knows he's looking for. Draco straightens, pulling himself up so that he's on his knees, straddling her legs. He towers over her, chest heaving, shoulders broad and muscled, flexing and rippling as he takes in the sight of her.

His eyes trail down her body as if taking one last look. Then, without warning, he leans over her once again, his fingers gripping the lace at her hips. With a single, violent tug, her knickers are at her ankles. He nudges her thighs, urging her to open them wider for him to situate himself between them.

She releases an uninhibited groan as she drops her head back onto the pillow behind her, accepting his suggestion without complaint.

Draco takes in the glistening folds before him and reaches forward, ghosting his fingers against them. His thumb brushes against her swollen bundle of nerves, causing her hips to buck as she begins to mumble various expletives under her breath.

He smirks, emboldened by her reaction, and leans forward, bringing his tongue to meet her slit. A ragged breath leaves her lips as her hands find their way into his hair. He teases her, moving his tongue at a glacial pace, taking a moment to swirl his tongue around her clit as his fingers tease her entrance.

Hermione's mouth falls open, her responses growing more animated with every second that passes. She'd missed this – missed him.

He pushes two fingers inwards and twists, curling them and pulling back as his lips close around her clit. He releases a breath of cold air before delicately sucking, evoking a sound he'd played on repeat in his mind for the better part of six years.

Hermione bends her legs around his head as she pulls at his hair, a symphony of gasps escaping her lips.

He quickens his pace, flicking his tongue as he rides his fingers, arching her back and kneading her breasts as feelings of exhilaration override any of her remaining inhibitions. *"Fuck... yes... Draco... I'm gonna..."*

She writhes under his touch, her eyes pinched shut while her orgasm washes over her. Her mouth falls open as a silent moan escapes her lips, her body trembling underneath his pressure. He doesn't stop his tongue, allowing her to ride out the waves of pleasure exploding throughout her core.

He kisses her clit once more for good measure before sitting up and taking in the sight before him.

His witch.

She lays with every inch of herself on display for him, her lips parted in the beginnings of a smile.

"You're beautiful," he whispers, kissing his way back up her body. She pulls him towards her once more, kissing him with a smile on her lips.

"More," she whispers between kisses, pushing his boxers over his hips and down his legs. She wraps her hand around his length not a second later, earning a groan from the back of Draco's throat.

"I've missed you," he whispers, pressing his face into the nape of her neck. He trails his finger down the length of her torso, gooseflesh taking over her entire body, her breath hitching.

"You're so fucking perfect," he breathes as he moves his hands to grip her thighs. "Everything about you."

Hermione breathes slow, calculated breaths, allowing him to take his time. She feels something stir in her gut as she watches him inspect every inch of her being. Pride, lust, longing, she isn't certain. But what she does know is that she'd never felt more beautiful than at this very moment.

His lips part, the tip of his tongue running along the inside of his cheek. Then, he pulls Hermione towards him, sliding his palm around her arse, grabbing it to jerk her towards him. His neck angles down towards her, tilting his head to the side to place kisses along her jawline.

They become frantic, driven by the lust of their pent-up desires of all the years that had passed. Hermione is certain that this is what ecstasy feels like, the sensation of her skin being pressed up against his.

Hermione grabs his jaw, forcing him back towards her lips as he uses his palm against the bottom of her spine to bring her forward. His lips taste sweet like cinnamon, his mouth warm and welcoming, tongue exploring her mouth in a frenzy.

Hermione rotates her hips to grind herself against him, earning a throaty moan from his lips. "Fuck," he mutters against her lips once more, drawing in a sharp breath as his length twitches. In

between kisses, he mumbles a variety of incomprehensible phrases “so lucky... always wanted... finally... so good,” only adding to the fire building in Hermione’s abdomen.

She continues to grind her hips against his, the air between them hot and thick with their exhales. Hermione laces her fingers through his hair and grips it tightly, her jaw falling open when his hips rise to meet hers. “Draco please,” she whines in a voice she can’t remember ever emerging from her lips. Her forehead falls against his, sticky with sweat as they rock against each other.

“Just since you asked so nicely,” he grins, resting palms on either side of her torso and bending down to kiss her breasts. Hermione squirms and laces her hands through his hair once more, her eyes falling shut. She feels like I’m glowing, every inch of her skin aflame, burning for more.

Hermione whimpers, her chin pointed upwards towards the ceiling. His free hand moves up to cup her breast, and he squeezes, pulling her nipple and twisting it gently between his thumb and forefinger.

“Draco, please,” she begs, still shaking as she props herself up onto her elbows to watch him straighten again. He nods, a devilish smile appearing on his face as he rolls to the other side of her.

Hermione swallows, rolling from her back onto her side. She gasps as Draco suddenly places his hands on her hips and pulls her onto him in one swift motion.

She moves rapidly, setting herself on his muscled thighs and placing her palms on his stomach. He nods at her, pulling his bottom lip between his teeth, and breathing heavily. His length twitches in her hand as she grabs it.

He carefully sits up, supporting himself on his elbows behind him on the mattress. Hermione rises onto her knees and moves towards him, stroking him slowly as she hovers above him. Then, just as she feels like she may explode, she wraps her free hand around the back of his neck and stares deeply into his eyes. Gliding her sex across his length, she moves forward to kiss him, their lips moving together in unison.

Both of their mouths are slightly ajar, taking in sharp breaths of air as Hermione guides his tip towards her, hissing as he lifts his hips to meet her.

She slowly lowers herself onto him, her forehead falling onto his as their hips meet. Draco circles his hips gently, tugging on her hair to expose her neck.

Hermione wraps her hands around his back, her nails sinking into his skin as he begins to thrust upwards, kissing and nipping at her throat. Hermione meets his pace, grinding towards him. He mutters her name under his breath, sprinkled with various expletives, unable to form a coherent thought as she scrapes her nails down his back.

They create a rhythm together, moving in synchronicity, her breasts meeting his chest with every move, brushing against his skin. “Draco,” she moans, both of them pulling each other’s hair as they move in unison.

“Say it again,” he rasps, his mouth pressed against her neck, his breath tickling her skin, awakening every inch of her.

“*Draco,*” she repeats, lifting herself further up, before releasing herself downwards once more as the fire in her navel continues to grow.

He groans into her skin, grabbing her face and turning it towards him before meeting her lips with his. He releases her curls, pressing her closer to him with both palms cupping her ass as she continues to meet his every thrust. He feverishly lifts her up and down, guiding her along his length while he emits shallow breaths.

“So good, Granger,” he whispers into her ear as their hips meet again and again. His fingers dig deep into her skin, and when he dips his chin down to take her nipple between his teeth, Hermione feels herself shatter.

Her second orgasm causes her to see stars, her body going tight, and then slacking again, shaking against him. She feels Draco shudder against her, his thrusts erratic, his groan filling the room. Her head falls down towards his shoulder as his thrusts slow, gasping for breath as their bodies shake.

After a moment he whispers, “come here,” pressing a delicate kiss to her mouth. They sit in silence, unmoving, as she kisses him back, holding his face in her hands. Hermione feels overwhelmed with the feelings of euphoria and affection as they sit, holding one another, attempting to catch their breath until Draco presses a soft kiss to her forehead, lifting her carefully off of him.

She collapses onto the mattress beside him, laden with exhaustion, and she shuts her eyes. Draco slides under the covers next to her, lifting the sheet so that she can join him. Hermione smiles at him as he pulls her body towards him. Hermione wraps herself around his core, planting a quick kiss on his cheek. He looks at her, grey eyes shining with admiration.

Hermione is unsure if her eyes are deceiving her, but for a moment she swears he’s glowing.

Chapter End Notes

“Ah, i giovani innamorati! Benvenuti!” = “Ah, the young lovers! Welcome!”

“Ho una prenotazione sotto Granger per la sera.” = “I have a reservation under Granger for the evening.”

“Sì, eccoti qui. Stanza 3, appena salite le scale a sinistra,” = “Yes, there you are. Room 3, just up the stairs to the left,”

“Grazie. Apprezziamo la vostra ospitalità.” = “Thank you. We appreciate your hospitality.”

“Sì, bellissima,” = “Yes, beautiful,”

Golden Snitches & Sunlight Kisses

Chapter Notes

Fun little filler chapter for us today, I hope you enjoy!!!

As always, I have so much love for my alpha/beta team: whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished. This fic would not be what it is today without these amazing authors. Please be sure to check out their work & subscribe to them if you haven't already!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Before the morning sun has had a chance to peek through the windows of the Hogwarts Castle, Cassie is already halfway to the Quidditch pitch. The announcement of the Charity Staff versus Students Quidditch match had left her positively giddy for the past few days.

It had been the Board of Directors' suggestion to host the match after the war – a fundraiser for the Janus Thickey Ward at St Mungo's. After Voldemort's defeat, many witches and wizards found themselves permanent residents in the ward, their minds tormented by the events they had lived through. Cassie knew that Professor Longbottom's parents resided in the ward, and was more than eager to help with raising funds in whichever way she could.

At first, she had assumed they would cancel the game that year, seeing as Hogwarts was also currently hosting the ICWC.

It was Hermione who mistakenly let it slip one day that the game would occur, though with a slight twist.

Typically the students would form an all-star team of sorts, each position filled by a member from one of the four houses. Then, the staff team was composed of their professors that were proficient on a broom, as well as the odd celebrity for the purposes of publicity.

This year, however, the match would be taking advantage of the global talent at their disposal: the teams would be composed of both Hogwarts and visiting students and staff.

For the first time ever, Cassie worried she wouldn't make it onto the all-star student team. She'd been a shoo-in for the past few years as a seeker, given her near-perfect record, and Slytherin's five consecutive Quidditch cups since she joined the team. This year, however, there would be a lot more students coming to try out for the team.

The Slytherin arrives at the pitch just as the morning's golden rays emerge over the horizon. Her cheeks are already flushed from the short walk from the castle, but she's adamant to get a few laps in before the try-outs begin.

"Hey you," she hears from the stands. Her face lights up at the sight of Caitlyn, already dressed in her Quidditch kit.

"Merlin Cait," Cassie grins, practically salivating at the sight.

“Ready to go?” Cait asks, hopping down onto the pitch, Starsweeper XX in hand.

“Three laps?” Cassie replies, mounting the new broom her fathers had given her for Christmas, the new and improved Moontrimmer. She was eager to try it, seeing as it’s able to fly higher than any other broom – perfect for a Seeker.

With that, the two witches take off into the golden-tinted sky, whipping around the pitch at a breakneck speed. Cassie releases her snitch – a gift from her godfather – just after the third lap, beginning to chase after it with an expression of glee spread across her face.

Eventually, hordes of students meander their way toward the pitch. Some are eagerly partaking in the try-outs, stretching their limbs and muttering under their breath as they do. Others are bundled up in various knits, happy to sit and observe from the stands.

Cassie’s personal favourite aspect of the whole ordeal is the fact that the all-star team is selected by popular vote. Each student who attends the tryouts as an observer is given a magically charmed ballot. When the tryouts come to an end, the votes for each position are magically tallied. For the position of Chaser, the three Chasers with the most votes are selected. For the Beaters, the top two. Where it gets tricky, however, are the positions of Seeker and Keeper, seeing as there is only one spot available.

Cassie tries to shake this small fact from her mind, reminding herself once more of the law of attraction.

“I am the all-star seeker, I am the all-star seeker, I am the all-star seeker,” she repeats under her breath.

The forty-two students are split into six teams at random. Each team plays in a short fifteen-minute scrimmage, during which each player attempts to convince the audience of their worthiness for a position.

Cassie’s team is the first to play. The team of two Gryffindors, an Uagadou student, a Beauxbatons student and an Ilvermorny student take to the sky under the name *The Fizzing Whizzbees*, their quidditch robes all shifting to a rather ghastly pink colour. Once well above the pitch, Cassie grins as she catches Caitlyn’s eye on the other side of the field in beautiful midnight blue robes.

The scrimmage passes in a flash, Cassie catching the snitch thirty-six seconds before the whistle is blown. As she holds the snitch proudly overhead, she notices the small figures of Bea, Elizabeth and Caelus waving a sign that says GO CASSIE GO! in bright green letters.

Caitlyn flashes her the finger as they land on the grass, calling her a drama queen for standing on her broom as she reached for the snitch.

“The people like a show. Quidditch is a performance art,” Cassie winks.

After cheering for their friends throughout the next two matches, Cassie can’t help but wonder which members of staff will make up their team. She’s certain that the seeker position will go to Krum, a fact that makes her stomach flip upside down and back again. Her aunt Ginny had played the year prior, as well as her godfather the year before that. She wonders if perhaps Professor Malfoy will join the team as well.

The two witches close their eyes and squeeze each other's hands as the votes are tallied. The moment she hears the cheers of her three favourite first-years behind her, however, Cassie knows that she'd been chosen.

Sure enough, the results are cast as a projection on the field.

SEEKER: LUPIN-BLACK, CASSANDRA

CHASER 1: CHANG, MELINDA

CHASER 2: JONES, CAITLYN

CHASER 3: FLINT, DANIKA

BEATER 1: YANKOVA, NIKOLAI

BEATER 2: HAMMOND, YUSUF

KEEPER: AKUMU, MUKISA

Draco isn't certain how Hermione convinced him to play on the staff team for the Charity Quidditch match. As far as he was concerned, his career was well and over with.

In the end, he supposes it had been her admitting to enjoying him in his Quidditch kit that had led to his agreement.

And so, bright and early, he makes his way to the staff room, two large mugs of coffee in hand. Hermione promised to meet him there, a fact he is still sour about. The witch was adamant that they not sleep in each other's quarters at school – citing something about “professionalism.”

Draco had attempted to convince her that they could be discreet, but the witch wouldn't budge. He was already brainstorming various reasons that the pair would need to leave the castle for a weekend here and there.

“Hi,” Hermione blushes the moment she notices him enter the room.

Draco makes his way to the empty seat to her left, staring daggers at Krum who had been looking in its general direction.

“So what position will I be playing if not Seeker?” he whispers, sliding one of the mugs across the table towards her.

“You'll see,” Hermione giggles before clearing her throat. “We'll go ahead and get started then!”

The witch rummages through a stack of parchment before her. “As we all know, I'm not very knowledgeable about Quidditch, but I am here to make sure everything runs smoothly on the administrative front. This Charity Quidditch match has raised funds that have enabled St Mungo's to modernise its facilities, further its research in the field, and continue to provide exceptional health care for our community.”

The witch pauses for a moment to take a sip of her coffee, glancing around the table to assure that all those present are paying attention.

“There’s also the fact that the students absolutely adore this tradition, and would likely riot if it wasn’t to occur this year,” she chuckles.

“The match will be featured on the Wizarding Broadcast Service, which graciously donates all the earnings from advertisements during the match to our cause. This match is also an excellent opportunity for our talented students to potentially be scouted by professional teams.”

“Do we know which students will be playing?” Neville asks.

Hermione casts a quick tempus charm before replying, “Yes, actually, their tryouts just concluded.” She waves her wand and the results appear before her. Many of the staff nod as they see the list, though both Remus and Draco grin as they read the name of the chosen seeker.

“Obviously with our visiting schools this year, the student team is likely to be stronger than ever,” Hermione continues. “Luckily, this year we have Professor Krum, a retired professional player who will be joining us, and I also convinced Ginny and Harry Potter to play as well.”

Draco grimaces at the mention of Krum, his frown only deepening when he notices Krum’s reaction to Hermione’s praise.

“The Staff team will be as follows,” Hermione smiles, casting the second roster next to the names of the students.

SEEKER: KRUM, VIKTOR

CHASER 1: POTTER, GINNY

CHASER 2: WILLIAMS, JOCELYNE

CHASER 3: SAKURAI, HARUKI

BEATER 1: MALFOY, DRACO

BEATER 2: POTTER, HARRY

KEEPER: COSTA, HELENA

Draco has to hold back a groan at the sight of his name next to the barbaric position that is a Beater – and partnered with Boy Wonder no less. He is hardly confident in their chances, seeing that they have two blokes playing the position that is the polar opposite of that which they normally do.

“I have booked you some time on the pitch to practise this week,” Hermione smiles. “You’ll need it,” she winks.

As the meeting concludes, Draco waits dutifully behind as Hermione speaks with each of the members of staff. He grows irritated, however, the moment Krum approaches her with a bow. He’s tempted to poke into the Bulgarian’s mind, but by this point, he’s just about learned his lesson – he’s not sure if he can take hearing another bloke’s *thoughts* about his witch without going positively barmy.

Once the room has cleared out, and only Draco and Hermione remain, he approaches her with a smile. Against his better judgement, he bows deeply in front of her, placing a delicate kiss on the

back of her hand.

“Oh stand up Draco you look ridiculous,” she scoffs, though she grins nonetheless.

“Shall we?” he asks.

“We shall,” she nods.

The Room of Requirement remains untouched from their previous research session: books lay strewn across the table and various pieces of parchment are stacked in seemingly random piles. Projected in the air is a starry night sky, the lunar cycle on display.

“I met with the parents of a child living with Lycanthropy yesterday,” Hermione frowns.

“Oh?”

“His name is Jeremy. He’s turning eleven in two months,” she adds.

“And as it stands, he will not be able to attend in the fall,” Draco reasons, already following her train of thought.

“Unless,” Hermione continues, gesturing to the surrounding space.

“We find a treatment.”

“Correct,” she nods.

“Well then, let’s get started Granger,” Draco smiles.

The pair throw themselves into their research once more, both silently moving about the room, wordlessly passing files to one another. They move around one another in perfect synchronicity, both their bodies and minds working in tandem. Both find it soothing to exist in this state of collaboration, the natural flow of it a familiar comfort.

December 27th, 1999, The Alchemy Lab, University of Oxford

“Malfoy,” Hermione calls out, her tone irritated.

“Speaking,” Malfoy drawls, raising his eyebrows as he peeks over the edge of his book.

“I was thinking,” the witch begins, standing to wipe her hands on her denims.

“Dangerous pastime,” Draco adds.

“I have an idea, for your mark.”

“Granger, just drop it. Your first two attempts went terribly,” Draco seethes. He’d been hoping that the witch would drop her hyper fixation with his mark. While Draco was more than eager to see the dreadful skull disappear from his skin, he is also a realist. Hermione calls him a pessimist, but the way Draco sees it, he’s simply judging the likelihood of success based on his experiences with luck so far – which has been absolutely abysmal.

“I think that I’ve been thinking about it in the wrong way, or from the incorrect perspective,” she continues, ignoring his remark completely.

Draco remains silent, deciding it is probably best to just allow the witch to ramble through her thought process.

“I’ve been trying to make the dark magic disappear, or cease to exist entirely. The alchemy I’ve made use of so far had been intended for banishing,”

Draco finds himself nodding despite his displeasure regarding the topic.

“I think I need to be summoning it instead,” she continues.

“Absolutely not,” Draco replies quickly. The last thing he needs is the dark magic escaping and potentially harming Granger. No, he will happily keep the magic contained, so long as it remains far, far away from the witch.

“I think we could channel it into an object, sort of like a Horcrux,” she continues, her tone pleading.

“What? So I can carry it around in a small urn and release it on my enemies?” Draco drawls.

Hermione ignores his quip, unrelenting. “I think the magic is too strong to be banished. I was reading about obscurials when I realised. Dark magic isn’t logical like light magic, it’s chaotic. It’s been around since the dawn of time, and will likely be here until the end. We can’t make it disappear, we simply need to move it elsewhere.”

Draco shakes his head. “Granger,” he begins, taking a deep breath. “I wouldn’t wish this upon anyone. Perhaps it’s my burden to bear.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Voldemort channelled the dark magic and infused it into your skin. That is not your fault,” Hermione argues.

They sit in silence, staring at one another with expressions of stubbornness.

“Fine,” Draco replies eventually. “What did you have in mind?”

March 21st, 2007, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

Despite his annoyance toward the beater’s bat currently in his grip, Draco finds himself smiling as he flies around the Pitch.

“Should have known,” he hears to his left, the Wizing World’s Saviour suddenly appearing in his peripheral.

“Oh good, it’s you, Potter,” Draco drawls.

“Lovely to see you too, Malfoy. Mione convinced you to play a different position as well then.”

“Astute observation Potter, I can see why you needed Granger as the brains of your whole operation,” Draco replies.

“Is there something going on between you two?” Harry asks.

“Let’s focus on the task at hand Potter, we need to figure out how to wield these lumps of wood in the next fifteen minutes.”

As the staff Quidditch practice comes to a close, Draco finds himself in an excellent mood. He’d missed playing his favourite sport, even if it was in the appalling position he’d been convinced to take on. By the end of the practice, he and Potter had managed to direct their bludgers through the goalposts with surprising accuracy.

“Nice job out there, Malfoy,” Ginny grins, wiping sweat from her brow.

“You too Weasley,” Draco replies.

“It’s Potter.”

“Potter didn’t want to take your last name? That isn’t very progressive of him,” Draco quips.

“Okay Draco Granger,” Ginny smirks.

Draco’s eyes go wide momentarily before he snaps his mind back into place. “It’s hardly fair that we have two professional quidditch players on our team,” Draco observes nonchalantly.

“Don’t forget the four professors and one stay-at-home dad,” Ginny adds with a grin.

The castle is practically bursting at its seams with excitement on the day of the match. Many students parade around the Great Hall with signs in hand, the names of their friends or favourite member of staff proudly on display.

All seven of the students who will soon take to the pitch sit together at the end of the Slytherin table, hunched over a charmed whiteboard in rapt attention. They review last-minute plays and strategies while scarfing down a substantial amount of breakfast foods.

Cassie rubs her thumb over the back of Caitlyn’s hand under the table as she reviews their latest play, one the team had only perfected the night prior. To no one’s surprise, Cassie had been awarded the position of Captain for the game, her teammates unanimously deciding that she was the best witch for the role.

“Remember that we’re here to play as a team. I know we haven’t had much time to form that usual bond, but I’m optimistic that we can make it work. I’m sure we’d all love to be scouted by the members of professional teams who will no doubt be in attendance, but they’re looking at your ability to play as a member of a cohesive unit, just as much as your ability to score goals, or whack a bludger, understood?” she asks.

The team all nod their heads, each fidgeting anxiously in their own way.

“Luckily, Krum is mine to worry about,” she continues, attempting to remain confident. “You all need to keep an eye out for Ginny Potter – especially Yankova and Hammond,” she adds,

maintaining eye contact with the two beaters.

“Akumu, she favours the centre goalpost, but she’s going to try to drag you towards the sides with a fake. I’d say 80% of the time, when she jerks to the side right before taking a shot, it’s a fake,” she continues. Luckily, Cassie had seen her aunt play on many occasions and is quite familiar with her tactics.

“Professor Malfoy and Potter are their beaters. I believe this will be to our advantage as both of them typically play Seeker.”

The witch pauses for a moment before adding, “but, we can’t expect anything. They could come out and be a force to be reckoned with.” From all the tales she’d heard from Hermione, she knows that Professor Malfoy is an exceptional athlete – she has no doubt that he’ll be able to step into this new role with ease.

The stands are filled to the brim with students, members of staff, parents, and quidditch fans. Over the past several years, the charity quidditch match had become a favourite amongst the wizarding community. Many travelled great distances for the game, fans of the sports enjoying seeing the students play before many of them would be scouted.

As Cassie takes her laps around the pitch, she easily locates her fathers in the stands. Sirius seems to have acquired a muggle foam finger, though upon closer inspection had taken it upon himself to transfigure it so that it was the middle finger at attention.

Behind them is a massive group of red-headed individuals who burst into cheers as Cassie swoops by. She can hear all the Weasley children shouting and pointing as she flies, though Charlie and Ron’s voice overpowers their little voices substantially.

Scanning the stands, she finds Hermione seated with the other Professors, adoring a frayed Slytherin scarf. Cassie rolls her eyes at the sight, having no doubts regarding where her godmother had acquired the article of clothing in question. The witch seems to be staring at something, her gaze unmoving.

Following her line of sight across the pitch, Cassie notices Professor Malfoy swinging his beater’s bat and stretching his arms above his head. The witch chuckles to herself as she flies by Hermione in the stands.

Madam Hooch, who is far too old to play in the match, happily walks onto the field as referee. “I want a good, clean match!” she declares, looking pointedly at both Ginny and Cassie. “That goes for both of you, you especially Weasley.”

The two witches shake hands, and Ginny sends a wink in Cassie’s direction before they take to the sky once more.

At the blow of the whistle, Cassie takes off, carefully trailing Krum around the pitch while keeping her eyes peeled for the snitch.

“Well folks, it’s an exciting match today!” Professor Lovegood smiles. She’d been very excited by the prospect of commentating another quidditch match.

“The sky today is just lovely. It’s a new moon tonight,” the witch continues. “Oh, sorry Headmistress!”

“Yes, well, we have quite the ensemble on the pitch. Lupin-Black and Krum are joining us as Seekers, which I find very interesting seeing as they are both Leos. The current retrograde should be affecting them both equally.”

“Lovegood!” the Headmistress yells.

“Anyway, on the student’s all-star team we have Melinda Chang of Ravenclaw house, Caitlyn Jones of Ilvermorny, and Danika Flint of Slytherin House. It really is lovely to see a Chaser team of all women, quite empowering if you ask me!”

Cassie smiles to herself, though she can’t help but wonder who thought it a good idea to ask the Divination professor to commentate the match.

“On the Staff and Co team, we have Ginny Potter of the Holyhead Harpies who is a dear friend of mine, Jocelyne Williams of Ilvermorny, and Haruki Sakurai, Hogwarts Arithmancy Professor and Mahoutokoro Alumni.”

The witch pauses, no doubt checking the rosters on the parchment before her.

“As beaters, we have Nikolai Yankova – who has a peculiar aura, mind you – of Durmstrang, and Yusuf Hammond of Gryffindor House! Now, the beaters for the Staff and Co team are quite interesting, to say the least. We have Professor Malfoy, head of Slytherin House, and Harry Potter: Saviour of the Wizarding World, The Chosen One, and one-third of the Golden Trio!”

Cassie has no doubt in her mind that her godfather is rolling his eyes at the extensive use of his various titles.

“I am not surprised that these Seekers agreed to play as Beaters, seeing as they are both very close with Professor Granger, who we all know is the mastermind behind this match and is known for being quite pushy when needed.”

Hermione groans at the mention of her name, much preferring to stay out of sight nowadays.

“Finally, as Keeper, we have Mukisa Akumu of Uagadou playing for the students, and Helena Costa, Hogwarts Ancient Runes Professor and Castelobrujo Alumna.”

By the time Luna’s introductions have concluded, the match is well and underway. “Yes, so the Staff and Co team have already scored twice, and the students once,” Luna smiles. “That brings us to 20 to 10.”

Cassie continues to circle the pitch, monitoring the Bulgarian professor. Out of the corner of her eye, she notices Bea, Elizabeth and Caelus in the stands once more, this time with two very large signs.

Caelus and Elizabeth pump their fists in the air, holding a green sign that flashes between the classic “GO CASSIE GO!” And “STUDENTS RULE, PROFESSORS DROOL.” Cassie stifles a laugh at the sight, admiring the creativity of the eleven-year-olds. To their left, Beatrice grins as she holds a sign that says “GO PROFESSOR MALFOY!”

Hermione sits on the edge of her seat as the game progresses, her eyes being pulled in far too many directions. She adores watching Ginny play, finding the witch's efficacy to be quite breathtaking. She also wants to watch Cassie, of course. But, while the action is elsewhere, she keeps her eyes locked on her two beaters. Harry appears to be having the time of his life, swinging his bat about like a child on Christmas morning with a new toy.

Draco appears to be taking on a more stoic approach, as is to be expected. Every time he swings his bat, Hermione swears she can feel her breath catch. There's something roguishly beautiful about the act, she decides. She's quite pleased with herself for convincing him to play, even though it had been initially for selfish reasons.

She'd missed seeing him in his quidditch kit – it truly was a sight to behold. She wonders momentarily if she might be able to convince him to wear it more often. Perhaps in private.

As Draco zooms across the field, he tries his best to stay focused. He feels a prickle at the back of his neck, and he knows that Granger has her eyes glued on his moving form – at least he hopes she does. He feels giddy at the prospect, and suddenly very consciously aware of how he may look at that very moment.

It had been satisfying to watch her happily put on his scarf, a simple act he'd thought about for quite some time now. He can't help but wonder if he might be able to convince her to wear his quidditch sweater again sometime. Perhaps in private.

He feels like a pubescent teenager for even wanting such a thing, but he's far past the point of denying himself life's pleasures. He's a simple man, really – a simple man who wants to see his last name across the back of his witch once more.

February 24th, 2001, The University of Oxford Quidditch Pitch

"Good game Malfoy," Hermione smiles.

"Did you bring a book this time?" Draco replies, patting down her pockets as if to verify.

"No, I watched the whole thing!" the witch exclaims, holding her hands above her head in surrender.

"Accio book," Draco whispers, a small book whizzing out of Hermione's back pocket and into his hand. "Quidditch for Dummies!?" he laughs.

"Yes, I'm trying to learn! Some of those diagrams are very helpful," she explains, reaching out in an attempt to grab the book.

Draco snatches it out of reach, flipping through the pages. "Granger, this is a load of Hogwash. You can't learn Quidditch from a book."

"Yes you can!" she argues. "I'm learning lots!"

"Not the stuff that matters, Granger. You don't need to memorise plays and the history of the game, you need to experience it."

“What do you mean, experience it?” she asks, her curiosity piqued. She has always been one to enjoy learning through doing – only after she’s done the necessary reading, of course.

“You need to watch the game. Get in the spirit!” he exclaims. “Buy popcorn and a butterbeer, make a sign, place bets, you know!”

“I will not be gambling, Malfoy!” she retorts.

“Fine, then next game you have to at least wear our team colours. Deal?” he asks.

“Fine,” she pouts, crossing her arms across her chest in a way Draco assumes is meant to be menacing. “Can I borrow something of yours?” she asks, her tone hopeful.

“I suppose,” Draco drawls, though secretly his heart skips a beat.

March 24th, 2007, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

His eye catches on a sight he hadn’t expected, derailing his train of thought, which was probably for the best.

There, in the stands, sit his parents. He groans, not loving the idea of his parents potentially mingling with his students. To make matters worse, he sees that his dear friends seem to have made the trip as well.

Pansy sits in an ensemble he can only assume is couture next to Blaise in a three-piece suit. Both are very much overdressed for a Quidditch match, though Draco is hardly surprised. The other two members of his entourage are dressed far more appropriately. Theo had opted to wear his favourite muggle attire as of late: a hoodie and denims. Daphne looks perfectly lovely as always, her blonde hair twisted into a plait.

He had purposely not extended the invitation to his friends and family. He loves them dearly, but the idea of them seeing him in Professor mode feels unnerving. In his mind, Professor Malfoy cannot exist in the same world as the usual Draco with whom they are all acquainted.

He already knows that an encounter and conversation with them after the match is unavoidable, so he starts to brainstorm various excuses as to why he hadn’t invited them.

After a gruelling two hours, Cassie catches the snitch. It had been an exhilarating sixty seconds from the moment she spotted it, to the moment she felt its cool metal against her fingertips.

However, as her teammates come speeding towards her, she’s certain that Krum had pulled back at the last second. They’d been neck and neck, their arms outstretched in unison.

And this upsets her because Cassie wants to win because she deserves it, not because some retired Quidditch player took pity on her and handed her the win.

She wants to know why he’d done it. She’s hopeful that it was because she’s a student, and he knew the scouts were watching her and not him. But, there’s a tiny whisper in the back of her mind that reminds her it could be for other reasons. Perhaps he doesn’t view her as an equal, of someone worthy of being in competition with him.

She tries to swat this thought from her mind, though she remains slightly perturbed by the win.

Draco lands on the grass and wipes sweat from his brow, smiling to himself as he watches the students all run onto the pitch. Every member of the student body encircle the players who had represented them, lifting them above their heads and chanting their names.

He's certain that Krum had let Cassie get the snitch, a fact he's certain the witch herself is aware of as well. He knows Krum was likely trying to do a nice thing, offering the win to a young witch to whom catching the snitch means a great deal more. But, he also knows that Cassie Lupin-Black is likely very upset about this act.

"My dragon!" he hears suddenly, his head whipping around toward the source of the noise.

"Ah mother, hello," he replies, straightening his posture ever so slightly.

"An excellent match, son," his father smiles. "Though I don't think this position suits you," he adds, gesturing toward his beater's bat.

"No, but someone had to do it," Draco replies.

"Draaaco000000," he hears next. There is no question as to who is approaching him, for he'd heard Pansy's signature drawl far too frequently over the years.

"Pans, Theo, Daph, Blaise," he nods, acknowledging their presence.

"We were surprised to discover that you would be playing in the match," Blaise smiles, his expression showing just how pleased he is with himself for bringing up their lack of invitation.

"Yes well, it was rather last minute. I figured you were all busy," Draco begins.

"Draco, you know that only one of us works," Pansy smirks, glancing toward Theo.

"I have all the time in the world to come watch my second favourite Hogwarts professor play a good old-fashioned game of Quidditch," Theo adds. "Speaking of, where is Granger?"

Draco shrugs, attempting to act nonchalantly. While he and Hermione had made things official the week prior, he was quite enjoying the current status of their relationship. Neither had told their friends and family as of yet. They aren't ashamed of each other in the slightest, but rather find comfort in the simplicity of their relationship without the opinions and input of external sources.

Draco plans to tell his friends and parents in due time but has no intention of doing so at this present moment.

Hermione stands on the opposite side of the pitch from Draco, though her eyes never leave his form.

"Earth to Mione," Cassie whispers, waving her hands in front of the witch's face.

"Oh, sorry Cass," Hermione replies, slowly blinking her eyes.

"So what do you think? Do you think Krum did it on purpose?" Cassie asks.

“Maybe, the win does mean a whole lot more to you than him,” Hermione suggests.

Cassie rolls her eyes at this, still displeased.

“Listen, Cass, take the win and stop overthinking it,” Hermione smiles.

“Fine,” Cassie frowns.

“There she is!” Sirius exclaims, picking his daughter up and spinning her around like he did when she was a child. “Our girl beat THE Viktor Krum!” he cheers.

“Good game Cass, we’re very proud of you,” Remus smiles.

Leaving Cassie with her fathers, Hermione slowly makes her way across the pitch toward Draco. She knows that he’s with his friends and family, but feels like it would be impolite for her to not come and say hello, especially as his girlfriend.

She still shivers every time she thinks of their evening in Positano – his declaration, and well, everything that came after. The whole ordeal almost felt like a dream, a situation she created in her mind to lull herself to sleep rather than her reality.

As she approaches the group, she feels her heart skip a beat at the sight. Draco in his quidditch kit, his arm tossed around Theo’s shoulder, a genuine smile on his face.

It makes her happy to see him happy.

For a moment she lingers, not wanting to interrupt whatever moment is transpiring amongst them. But, of course, Theo spots her.

“Granger!” he shouts, beckoning her towards them.

“Hello Theodore,” she smiles.

“Well, Granger, aren't you a sight for sore eyes,” Blaise grins.

“Still wearing muggle denims I see,” Pansy observes, though there is no maliciousness to her tone.

“I think she looks lovely,” Daphne adds, sending a kind smile in Hermione’s direction.

“Hermione, lovely to see you dear,” Narcissa smiles.

“You as well, Narcissa.”

All those present are shocked by the use of the witches’ first names, save for Draco.

“Miss Granger, a pleasure,” Lucius nods.

“It’s good to see you, Mr. Malfoy,” Hermione replies quickly.

“I heard from a certain friend of mine that you two made the trip to Positano this past week,” Narcissa adds, her intonation perfectly calculated and poised.

“We did, yes,” Draco replies, sending a pleading look toward his mother, hoping that she would not press further.

“A rather romantic location, no?” Pansy asks, her tone as sarcastic as ever.

“One might say,” Draco drawls.

“We were there for research purposes,” Hermione adds, hoping to help the conversation along.

“Oh, *research* you say?” Blaise asks, raising an eyebrow.

“What kind of research?” Theo echoes.

“Perhaps human anatomy?” Pansy suggests.

“That is quite enough,” Draco replies, his cheeks growing red.

Noticing just how flustered Draco seems to be, Hermione does what she does best. “It was actually quite fascinating. We believe that the treatment for lycanthropy may be a combination of an alchemical ritual and a potion. As you know, the Wolfsbane potion, while effective, only treats the symptoms, not the root cause of the symptoms,” she explains.

Many of those present nod thoughtfully, though Hermione can tell they aren’t listening, not really.

Draco smiles to himself, ever thankful for his witch and her quick-wittedness. He allows his mind to wander once more as she continues to ramble, wondering if perhaps he might convince her to take a weekend getaway with him later that month. He isn’t certain if he’ll be able to last much longer with this whole professionalism thing.

The sun kisses her cheeks, its light illuminating her curls. Her hands move back and forth as if Hermione is conducting a heavenly symphony of spirit and enthusiasm, and Draco finds he could listen to it forever. He stares at her unabashedly, not caring in the slightest that his friends and family have likely noticed just how taken he is with the witch.

Chapter End Notes

I adore each and every one of you! Happy (almost) New Year!

This morning, with her, having coffee.

Chapter Notes

Welcome baaack! Can't believe we're officially approaching the final 1/3 of this fic. I'm already emotional tbh. Thank you to those who have been following along and leaving comments & kudos - it means the world to me!

Enjoy this chapter where we finally discover how miss brightest witch of her age managed to remove draco's mark.

As always, I have so much love for my alpha/beta team: whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished. This fic would not be what it is today without these amazing humans.

*“This morning,
with her,
having coffee.”*

– Johnny Cash, when asked for his description of paradise.

Hermione has always been a morning person. She enjoys the serenity of the day's early hours – the quiet granted to those who rise before the rest.

She'd found a rhythm of sorts over the past several weeks, assuring that all of her grading and other administrative duties were completed by 19:00 at the absolute latest. Her check-ins with the younger muggleborn students would take place during her preparation periods and weekends, all so that her evenings remained free of any conflicting meetings or distractions.

Because as of 19:00, Hermione would make her way to the lab in the room of requirement and set to work. But, over the past few days, she had found that her evenings were no longer sufficient. It had been Draco's idea that they meet for an hour or two in the mornings before classes commenced.

His suggestion was rooted in both a genuine desire to help ease the witch's anxiety and a selfish need to spend even more time with her than they already were.

If he was ever held at wand point and forced to choose the one thing he missed most about their time in Oxford, it would be enjoying their morning coffee together. Sometimes, this would take place in their café, others in the lab, or their flats. But, no matter the location, smiling over the brim of his porcelain mug as the witch spoke animatedly about whichever topic had piqued her interest was always his preferred way to start his mornings.

In the Alchemy section of the Hogwarts Library, Hermione sits with a small smile on her face. The library is completely and utterly silent, allowing her to progress through her homework at a pace even quicker than normal. While the witch adores her school and the library, in particular, she does find it difficult to focus from time to time, especially when the shelves are occupied by copious amounts of rambunctious students.

Hermione knows she can't expect everyone to work in the same way as her – but she finds it utterly ridiculous the sorts of things that people choose to make use of the library for.

In her mind, the library is a sanctuary, a place to escape so that one can focus on a task – or many tasks – with only their own mind as company. So, when students choose to engage in heated arguments about their significant other's infidelity in the Ancient Runes section, or snog by the Potions tomes, she remains perplexed.

She'd started venturing to the library in the early hours of the day in her third year, her time-turner making it far easier to maximise her study time. Now, two years later, she still weaves her way through the corridors each morning, a cup of coffee in tow. Her Mary Janes click against the stone beneath her feet, only halting when a feline familiar crosses her path to offer them a quick pat on the head.

When she arrives at the library at 5:00 on the dot, she pushes the door open, the first student of the day to do so. Hermione knows it isn't a competition, but she can't help but feel slightly accomplished by this fact.

Madam Pince used to glance up at her for a split second, perturbed by her early arrival. By now, she ignores the witch completely, confident that Hermione is not one to break any rules, and will certainly return all her volumes to their rightful place on the shelves.

Today, Hermione is determined to finalise her transfiguration essay, which is due in two weeks' time. She's already a good few inches over the required length, but she knows that Professor McGonagall won't mind.

Her footnotes are detailed, and her citations accurate, but she skims what she'd written nonetheless for the fifth time – one can never be too sure whether or not there is a comma splice at large.

Just as she approaches the bottom third of her essay, she feels a slight tingle on the back of her neck. She glances up, looking around with a furrowed brow. Her tempus spell reveals it is still far too early for any other student to have made their way into the library.

Perhaps a ghost, she reasons, turning back to her work.

However, a few shelves away just behind the restricted section, Draco quietly tucks into a table with his textbooks and homework in hand. He lays out his parchment, his transfiguration essay already well and underway.

The Slytherin common room had become intolerable as of late, the students far too unruly for his liking. Crabbe and Goyle never left his side long enough for him to get any work done, and Theo had made quite the habit of disappearing completely.

Draco knows he will never be at the top of his class academically – a fact he had to come to terms with some time ago. But, he'd taken great pride in remaining in the top five over the past few years,

always swapping places with Theo, Terry Boot, Anthony Goldstein, and Lisa Turpin. Granger, however, remained consistently in the top spot.

With all of the unwelcome distractions that his fifth year had brought, Draco had decided to start making use of the library in the early hours of the morning.

He, too, has always enjoyed his mornings ever since he was a child.

He likes the calmness of it all, the way everything feels gentle, each sound seeming much louder than if it was to occur during the afternoon.

Narcissa had always been an early riser, and so Draco had learned to be as well. Many of his childhood mornings had been spent reading in the garden or flying on his broom overhead whilst his mother tended to her roses. Sometimes Lucius would join in, sipping on his coffee as he flipped through the morning paper.

But the best part of this whole arrangement was that none of the inhabitants of the Malfoy home uttered a single word to one another until breakfast time. Each of them appreciated the quiet and stillness of the morning and was happy to maintain this quiet, even in the presence of their loved ones.

On this rainy spring day, Draco figured the library would be empty given the ungodly hour, but of course, it wasn't.

His heart rate had spiked the moment he'd caught a glimpse of her curls. Because *of bloody course*, Hermione Granger is in the library before the sun has even begun to pierce the horizon.

Now, he finds himself unable to focus on his essay, though he isn't exactly sure why.

October 10th, 1996, The Hogwarts Library

He wants to be anywhere other than that blasted room. His trials with the cabinet had only just begun, the task already proving to be far more difficult than he had anticipated. The common room had slowly become a stark contrast to the prior five years, the students of Slytherin house all aware of what was on the horizon.

Instead of the usually rambunctious activities of the snakes, the common room is eerily silent. Many had some sort of inkling regarding Draco's involvement in Voldemort's growing regime. After a few short weeks, he had already catalogued both those who stared at him with some kind of reverence – viewing him as a chosen one of the dark – and those whose opinion of him was one of disdain.

He wishes that he was anyone else – one of the students who are able to form an opinion on those involved rather than a moving piece on the board. Because that's exactly what he is – a chipped and worn chess piece on Voldemort's board – a pawn at best. He envies his peers who are able to sit back and observe, contemplating the Dark Lord's next move. Instead, he cowers in his tiny black square, flinching the moment the tyrant moves his wrist.

The common room had been leaving him with a feeling of uneasiness in his gut, an omnipresent sensation of dread hanging over the space, intertwined with the green aura emitted from the lake.

And so, once more, Draco finds himself in the library.

It's early, far too early for any other living being, but considering Draco had yet to fall asleep, he chooses to view it as late.

The ancient door swings open, revealing countless shelves of volumes new and old. The library had hardly shocked him upon his arrival at the school – the Malfoy family library a comparable collection of tomes.

He's far too exhausted to actually accomplish anything, his homework sitting incomplete somewhere in his trunk. He knows that he will not be in the top five of students this year, but he can hardly find it in him to care, considering what's to come.

As much as he hopes that Voldemort's tyranny will end with him crashing and burning – a fact that he keeps tucked behind a vast array of occlumency shields – he is also attempting to prepare himself for the possibility that the psychopath currently inhabiting his childhood home may very well succeed.

Over the summer, he'd grown to resent his parents in a way. Though, he also realises that he's more so upset at his parents for what their parents did to them.

It was not Narcissa Black, nor Lucius Malfoy who chose their current allegiances – it had been Abraxas Malfoy, Cresseida Nott, Cygnus III Black, and Druella Rosier.

Draco's parents were well-aware of the fact that their allegiances were set in stone whether they maintained the beliefs of those who came before them or not. Lucius had done his best to lie low during the first war – fly under the radar, an associate rather than a direct supporter. This had all changed upon The Dark Lord's rebirth, an event that still horrified the entire Malfoy family.

Now, for some reason still unknown to them, Voldemort had chosen Malfoy Manor as his home base. Draco has his suspicions that this is due to his father's failure at the Ministry in June. When Lucius had been instructed to assemble a team to intercept the prophecy from a group of fifth-year students, he had done everything in his power to keep Bellatrix as far away as possible. But, of course, his psychopathic aunt had arrived in the ministry atrium in a wisp of black smoke alongside her fellow death eaters.

Lucius had been determined to not maim any of the children. He would do exactly as he was instructed – retrieve the prophecy. To no one's surprise, this plan had quickly gone awry, leaving him with the impossible choice of harming children or disobeying direct orders. He knew that either way – someone would be hurt, the children before him, or his own family.

Things had only worsened for the Malfoy family since then, Voldemort holding their own lives over their heads as bait.

Now, Narcissa Malfoy's worst fear had come true – her son had been branded. All those years ago, she'd been elated by the defeat of the Dark Lord, the knowledge that her son would remain untouched an answer to all of her prayers.

And so, Draco had quite a lot going on at the moment, his once calm and organised mind a frenzied mess. He craves the quiet and solitude of the library – the way the shelves embrace him like an old friend, protecting him from the outside world.

And of course, there *she* is at her table, the one tucked in the back by the window. He knows better than to alert her to his presence, for she would likely storm out of the library with a scowl on her face. He knows that his presence alone is an unfortunate reminder of what's coming for many students, something he can hardly blame them for – and Granger perhaps most of all.

So, he disillusion himself as his mind spins, providing himself with a brief reprieve every few moments to stare in her direction.

March 22nd, 1999, The Hogwarts Library

“Hi Malfoy,” Hermione smiles, beginning to gather her parchment in an attempt to clear a space for him at her table. She'd begun to anticipate his arrival each morning, and funnily enough, found herself looking forward to his quiet presence.

“Granger,” he nods, situating himself in the chair to her right. He levitates two cups of coffee onto the table before them, his daily routine.

“Have you finished the Alchemy assignment?” she asks, eagerly taking a sip of her coffee. She knows that it will be the perfect temperature and is prepared just how she likes it.

“Yes.”

“It was fascinating, wasn't it?” she smiles. Hermione finds Draco to be an excellent study partner, one who is able to follow her train of thought with ease.

“Yes, I noticed a lot of links to the brewing process of healing potions,” he adds, removing his potions textbook from his satchel.

“I did as well. I wonder if the two might be combined,” she begins, her thought trailing off.

“Historically, bodily healing has focused on the more concrete branches of magic, rather than alchemy, which can be unruly at best and is often reserved for spiritual healing,” Draco replies, for he had already had the same hypotheses.

“Well, it seems ridiculous that no one has ever thought to try—”

“Granger, wizards are quite stuck in their old ways. What's that muggle saying you told me about?”

“If it isn't broken, don't fix it,” she laughs.

“Yes, well I would say that is the official motto of wizarding society. Innovation is certainly not at the forefront of any field,” Draco chuckles. The sensation is still peculiar to him – comfortable laughter, that is.

Hermione's mind begins to whirl, wondering if perhaps she might be the first to accomplish such a feat.

February 5th, 2000, The Forest of Dean

“Do you trust me?” she whispers, her brow furrowed.

“Granger, I honestly think you’re the only one that I would allow to experiment on me like this,” he replies.

“It’s unlikely that it will work on my first try, but even if it doesn’t, the results should help me narrow down the variables that need altering,” she explains for the fourth time.

“Granger, just do it.”

The potion had been brewed throughout the past lunar cycle, the evening’s new moon the perfect opportunity to conduct their first attempt at removing Draco’s dark mark.

Hermione had been exceptionally meticulous in her preparations but the moment she takes a deep breath and begins, she enters a trance fuelled by nothing more than her desire to help the wizard.

The salt is laid in the grass in a circular formation around Draco, two smaller circles contained within its boundary. Glass jars of dittany, dragon liver, fluxweed, wormwood, water, abraxan hair, and unicorn blood lay by her side. First, she pours the unicorn blood on the outermost circle, the salt sizzling upon contact. She then sprinkles the green fluxweed upon the second circle and the ground wormwood on the third.

Draco grimaces as she spreads a thin paste across his mark, a gruesome combination of dittany, dragon liver and abraxan hair. She hands him a bundle of cloth which he quickly places between his teeth to bite down upon. He groans, already dreading the process.

A small jar of water is poured on the second circle, the fluxweed-infused salt seeping into the soil below. She begins the first spell, chanting as she waves her wand.

“tenebras vocat ad tenebras, et ad quas redire debes.”

Draco feels his pulse quicken the moment the words leave her lips, quite frightened by the low tone her usually cheery voice had taken on.

Hermione takes a deep breath, readying herself for the most important aspect of the ritual.

Without wasting a moment, Hermione removes a pack of matches from her beaded bag. She had a hypothesis that fire evoked from the earth, rather than magic, may be more effective with such a ritual. She strikes the match against a flat stone, carefully holding it to the unicorn blood-infused salt. As the flame spreads it emits an atrocious stench, and she has to stop herself from gagging, knowing that now – time is of the essence.

“Advoco te, libero te excipio ut evadas, et redeo unde venisti.”

Draco feels every inch of skin on his body begin to tingle as she repeats the phrase once more.

“Advoco te, libero te excipio ut evadas, et redeo unde venisti.”

The witch touches the tip of her wand to the paste on his forearm as she chants, moving her wrist in an arch-like motion.

“Advoco te, libero te excipio ut evadas, et redeo unde venisti,” she repeats, her voice growing more powerful with every syllable.

The fire surrounding them causes sweat to drip down her brow, blurring her vision. Her hand shakes, but her voice remains assured.

“ADVOCO TE, LIBERO TE EXCIPIO UT EVADAS, ET REDEO UNDE VENISTI!”

Draco’s entire body trembles, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. He can feel his blood flowing, every single molecule of his being suddenly distinguishable from the rest.

He feels a burning sensation where his mark lies on his arm, and he knows that Granger is about to perform her last chant. Her wand emits a bluebell flame, lighting the paste ablaze on his skin.

He wants to scream; he wants to cry, but he knows in his heart that Granger will succeed. As instructed, he drinks the blue potion, the thick liquid the consistency of honey and almost tasteless.

“ADVOCO TE, LIBERO TE EXIPIO UT EVADAS, ET REDEO UNDE VENISTI,” she yells, tears streaming down her face.

She wraps her arms around the wizard, holding him tight. He begins to spasm, his limbs moving of their own accord. Ten seconds feel like an eon, but after the tenth second comes to a close, Draco’s body stills.

Hermione quickly moves, banishing the paste and quickly pouring dittany on the wound.

Draco opens his eyes, staring down at his forearm. The substance sizzles in his freshly burned skin, bubbles of reddened skin causing his entire arm to throb.

Reddened skin.

Where Draco’s skin was once plagued by a gruesome skull and snake, remains only reddened skin.

He feels his eyes well up with tears at the sight, his other hand coming to touch his forearm.

He turns to Hermione, his lips spread into an elated grin.

But the witch doesn’t meet his gaze – her body lays crumpled on the soil next to him.

“Granger?” he whispers, placing a hand on her shoulder. He feels like he might throw up at the sight – is she in pain? Where had the dark magic gone? Had it hurt her?

He’d known this was a bad idea.

Why the witch thought he deserved some kind of redemption arc is beyond him, especially if it harmed her in the process.

He begins to shake her, albeit slightly more aggressively than needed.

She slowly looks up at him, her eyes hazy. “We did it,” she smiles feebly.

“You did it,” he replies.

“I’m okay, just drained,” the witch whispers.

He feels his breath steady, and his heartbeat slow. “I can carry you back,” he suggests.

“Need to check your vitals,” the witch explains as she tries to right herself. She fails miserably, lowering her cheek to the soil once more.

“I can check my own Granger,” he replies, already casting the diagnostic spell. A beat later, he adds, “see all normal?” leaving the projection visible for her to check for herself. Her eyes scan the results before she nods, clearly satisfied.

“Where is it?” he asks.

“What?” Hermione replies, confused.

“The dark magic.”

She points her finger behind him, his body turning him quickly toward the location. His senses are heightened, what had the witch done with it?

There, in a small patch of grass, is a jar.

A jar containing darkness. There are no words to describe this darkness, for it is not a shape, nor a being. It resembles fumes, though it is too solid to be considered gaseous. It could be perhaps compared to oil, though it is far too opaque to be likened to this entirely.

Without thinking, he picks up the jar for closer inspection, his fingers slowly turning the glass as if it will eventually reveal its true nature.

“What do we do with it?” he asks.

“If I’m being honest, I hadn’t thought that far ahead. I didn’t want to jinx the ritual by assuming that we would succeed,” she replies, her face solemn as she takes a seat, her back upright.

“We could bury it.”

“That’s probably the best option. At least then there’s an extremely low chance anyone will be able to steal it for themselves and potentially use it for their own tyrannical domination,” she laughs.

The wizard nods, flicking his wand at the soil next to him, a hole the exact size of the jar forming, its depth seemingly endless. Without wasting another moment, Draco drops the jar into the hole, watching it disappear into nothingness.

“Well, that’s that then,” Hermione smiles, her energy slowly returning, and her magic begins to flow through her veins once more. She’d been prepared to be drained after the ritual, but the outcome had been far worse than she’d expected.

For a split second, just before the final incantation was complete, she’d been certain that she was going to lose consciousness. She chooses to keep this fact to herself, however, not wanting Draco to worry, or feel bad whatsoever. Truthfully, she would go through the entire process again in a heartbeat, if it meant that Draco could rid himself of the darkness that was plaguing him.

As she’d got to know him better, she’d realised that the darkness she could sense in his presence wasn’t in his nature – it did not originate from the wizard himself, but rather had been forced upon him.

She knew that he had turned to sleeping potions before brewing his own – *felix memorias* he'd called it – his night terrors lifelike enough to follow him into his waking hours.

Besides the mental and physical effects, she had noticed the emotional ones as well, especially over the past few months. Though he tried to hide it, she would often notice him staring down at the mark with a scowl, whatever joy that had been present in his features fading into a cold sort of expression.

She imagined it would be quite difficult to move on from the events of the war, especially with a constant reminder branded into your own skin. She supposes her own scar was similar in that way, though she'd grown to accept it over time.

It isn't that she likes the look of it – because truthfully it is quite gruesome looking – she'd simply embraced it and everything it represented.

Mudblood.

Such a funny word if you think of it, almost the sort of insult that a child might come up with. But, in all truthfulness, she is a mudblood, and quite frankly, she's proud to be one.

While she certainly does not condone the use of the word in the slightest, she herself has reclaimed the word and all its horrendous past. Because despite the so-called impurity of her blood, she had managed to play a large role in the defeat of the very people who wanted her dead. It had been a mudblood who destroyed a Horcrux, who watched as Voldemort crumbled into nothingness. It had been a mudblood who refused to give into Bellatrix's torture, who had put her life on the line time and time again.

Over time, the word had lost the bite that it once had. It no longer stung to hear it roll off of someone's lips or to notice it inscribed on her skin. Because that's exactly what she is.

It's one of the many titles she holds, another word to add to her trophy case. Each of her titles carries its own weight, their own reminders and meanings. She views them all as components of her identity, each representing her in different ways.

The Brightest Witch of her Age.

The Golden Girl.

Order of Merlin, First Class.

Mudblood.

Regardless of her own healing journey, she's glad that she'd been able to help Malfoy move forward. She knows that the trauma he incurred throughout the experience will take far longer to heal, but she hopes that by ridding his skin of the physical representation, the healing might progress a little easier.

March 29th, 2007, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry

Draco arrives with two cups of coffee in hand, pacing in front of the barren wall until the ornate door appears before him.

Hermione is already hard at work, as she usually is. “Hey you,” she smiles, interrupting her thought process just long enough to stand on her tippy toes and place a gentle kiss on his cheek.

“I think I’ve finalised the modified potion,” she smiles, jumping aboard her train of thought once more.

“Oh?” he asks, peering over her shoulder at the mess of parchment on the table, attempting to follow her drawings and scrawl from one to the next.

“I also have a theory,” she begins, biting her lower lip.

Draco stares at her for a moment, his mind growing hazy at the sight.

“I think we may be able to infuse the salt with Aconite,” she continues, completely oblivious to Draco’s reaction.

“Like the fluxweed?” he asks, being momentarily transported to their last joint alchemical ritual.

“Exactly,” she nods.

“Ground aconite?”

She nods once more, beginning to pick at her nail beds. “I was thinking of the ritual we performed on you, actually.”

He remains silent, waiting for her to continue. Her body language is currently telling him all that he needs to know about her current mental state.

Picking at her nail beds, biting her lip, her hair a frazzled mess.

The Brightest Witch of Her Age is on the precipice of a breakthrough.

“This may sound barmy but hear me out,” she begins. “Do you think we could... summon the inner wolf?” she asks, her gaze finding his. Her expression is weary, as if she’s worried he’ll find her suggestion ridiculous.

“But where will it go once summoned?” he asks, his brow furrowed.

“I think—I think it will be freed,” she replies, her voice almost a whisper.

Lucky Professor Malfoy

Chapter Notes

Welcome back! Sorry for the delay with this chapter, my life is in shambles right now as I attempt to find a new place to live whilst also working and attending grad school full time. My mental health was in the gutter and it was hard to find the motivation to write.

So thankful for each and every one of you who are following along with TSAU xx

As always, beta love to whits_end ♡ & the ever-present support of callcalypso & likelyunfinished.

Despite Professor Granger's best efforts to remain professional in her association with a certain potions master while on school grounds, the students who are particularly observant started to notice something occurring between the two staff members.

"Guess what?" Joy Green gushes as she eagerly takes her usual seat at the Slytherin table.

"What?" Cassie asks, bubbling with excitement. Joy has always been quite the gossip, but Cassie would be lying if she said that she didn't find her friend's affinity for making everyone's business, well, *her business*, ever so helpful from time to time. One never knows if a small tidbit of information may prove quite convincing when used at just the right moment.

"I just saw Professor Granger and Professor Malfoy walking together near the forest," the blonde witch grins, wiggling her eyebrows.

Cassie keeps her mouth shut, knowing that her godmother will hex her if she confirms any of her fellow students' suspicions. Three glasses of cabernet sauvignon were all it took to get the witch to spill all the details regarding the recent developments of her whirlwind romance.

"There was only one bed," Hermione had giggled, her cheeks flushed as her mind reminisced.

"Oh?" Cassie replies, careful to keep a nonchalant tone.

"And Professor Granger was holding his arm, it was ever so romantic," Joy continued, relishing in the rapt attention her housemates are providing her.

"Lucky Professor Granger," Celia Macintosh pouts. The Slytherin keeper has been harbouring a rather one-sided crush on their head of house since September, a fact that her friends enjoy teasing her about incessantly.

"More like lucky Professor Malfoy," Daniel Evans grins, elbowing his friend.

"Excuse me, that's my godmother you're speaking about!" Cassie replies, feigning offence.

“Not my fault your godmother is bloody fit,” Daniel winks, shovelling a sausage into his mouth. “I’d let her hold a whole lot more than my arm...”

Fortunately for all those present, a well-aimed smack across the face with the morning’s edition of the Daily prophet cuts the boy’s comment short.

“I saw them talking in the corridor the other day,” Celia adds. “Professor Malfoy looked quite pleased with himself – I don’t think I’ve ever seen him smile like that before.”

Cassie smiles to herself at the thought.

“I can’t go on with the possibility of you thinking that I felt nothing for you. I’ve felt something for you since the first time I saw you, Hermione. This feeling, the way I feel in your presence, I want that feeling forever, but more than that, I want you. The person you make me, the way you fill me with light, means more to me than you’ll ever know.”

After Hermione had recounted word for word what the potions master had said, Cassie had been wholly convinced that Morgana herself blessed her godmother. Since when are wizards capable of expressing themselves that way?

Just the year prior, a Gryffindor bloke in her year had asked her if she wanted to “snog sometimes, you know... *for fun* .”

“Well, I think it’s all ever so romantic,” Joy smiles, sipping her tea. “They did attend school together, you know.”

“Yeah, like every other witch and wizard in Britain,” Daniel laughs.

“No you toad, they went to *Oxford* together,” Joy explains, eyes twinkling at the prospect of sharing information with the group.

“I found an old edition of the prophet in the library the other day while I was researching for Alchemy,” the witch continues, sliding a newspaper cutting across the table.

Cassie smiles the moment the photo comes into view.

Both Hermione and Draco adorn the traditional graduation attire, a square cap with long billowing robes and purple v-stoles draped around their necks.

They smile at the camera, but the moment the flash flares, they turn to one another, their smiles shifting ever so slightly, appearing far more genuine than they had been a split second prior.

The caption reads: Hermione Granger (Golden Girl and Brightest Witch of Her Age) and Draco Malfoy (Former Death Eater and Heir of the Malfoy Fortune) publish groundbreaking research regarding their treatment for The Dragon Fever.

“Ugh imagine if they had a torrid affair, perhaps academic rivals, enemies to reluctant friends to lovers romance,” Joy continues, her eyes glazing over.

“Joy, you need to stop reading those muggle romance novels. They’re convincing you that these unrealistic types of relationships exist,” Daniel guffaws, turning to his friend for whatever kind of support he evidently needs.

“Just because you lack the emotional depth to form meaningful relationships with witches doesn’t mean they’re unrealistic, Evans,” Joy retorts.

“Maybe if you took a page out of Professor Malfoy’s book, you’d actually manage to stick your *wand* somewhere other than your own arse,” Celia spits. The pair had always had a certain amount of tension between them, a fact that was blatantly obvious to everyone except for themselves.

“Thinking about my wand, are you Macintosh?” Daniel winks, making a crude gesture with his hands.

It wasn’t just the seventh-year Slytherins that were noticing the blooming romance between the Charms Professor and the Potions Master.

“Why is Professor Malfoy always showing up at Professor Granger’s office?” Bea asks innocently.

“He always shows up right at the end of my meetings with Professor Granger,” Elizabeth adds, for she had been wondering the same thing.

“Well, they’re both professors. I’m sure there’s no shortage of professor stuff to talk about,” Caelus suggests, serving himself a large heaping of bacon.

“It must be fun to be a professor. They’re always smiling,” Bea grins.

“Maybe we can be professors one day!” Elizabeth exclaims.

Though Draco is certain that none of his N.E.W.T students will succeed in brewing wolfsbane, he assigned it to them anyway. It had been Granger’s idea, actually, to have them brew it.

“They have brilliant minds, Draco, minds that have only recently acquired the understanding of the finer concepts of potion brewing. The concepts are fresher in their mind, and the details that we may skim over will stand out to them. See what they do with it, see if any of them notice anything.”

So, Draco had done just that. On the one hand, he agreed it is a rather excellent idea. On the other, he assumed the students would find this far more interesting than the lesson he’d planned on the 52 uses for Bubotuber pus.

The students are placed into two groups – the ingredients are far too expensive and difficult to acquire to allow for individual brewing.

“Each member of your group has a specific role,” he explains. “This potion is exceedingly hard to brew. The most disastrous of results can occur should even the slightest step go awry.”

The students nod in rapt attention, all eager to try their hand at the infamous potion.

“This week, each student will take on the responsibility of researching one of the four key ingredients: the preparation, the appearance, or the effects. Next week, your group will put their heads together to attempt this brew, supervised by myself and Professor Granger.”

A few of the witches in the class smile at the mention of the charms professor – many students admire her a great deal. Others, however, have begun to suspect that there may be something

brewing amongst their professors, and many galleons had been exchanged and bets placed regarding the pair.

“You will each submit an essay on your topic by the end of this week. I need to see that you are adequately prepared before embarking on this brew,” Draco continues, waving his wand toward the blackboard. The chalk comes to life, levitating in front of the surface as it begins to write.

Aconite.

Black Quicksilver, pulverised.

Giant moonwort.

Myrrh, pickled in carrow spider ichor.

The following week, the N.E.W.T students gather around their respective stations. A pulsating sort of energy is present in the dim classroom, and all of those present are excited by the task. Many of the students are pursuing potion masteries and are eager to impress their future supervisors with their experience with the brew. Others simply enjoy a challenge and the rush that comes with academic success.

The two professors, however, are excited for an entirely different reason. While reading through the stack of student essays that very morning, Hermione had spilled her coffee all over herself.

This accident was not a result of mere clumsiness, but rather because she read a phrase that completely altered how she'd approached the wolfsbane potion.

Botrychium lunaria is a species of fern in the family Ophioglossaceae, known by the common name moonwort or common moonwort. It is the most widely distributed moonwort, growing throughout the Northern Hemisphere across Eurasia and from Alaska to Greenland, as well as temperate parts of the Southern Hemisphere.

Giant Moonwort has long been used in potions as a binding agent, one that is able to fuse elements together, allowing their respective properties to synchronise.

Myrrh – a gum resin extracted from a number of small, thorny tree species of the genus Commiphora – and Aconite possess qualities that are diametric opposites of one another. While Aconite is poisonous and even lethal, Myrrh is healing and soothing.

While these qualities would seemingly cancel one another out, or simply render the weaker of the two ingredients futile, the Moonwort is able to create a fusion between the two.

The Wolfsbane potion requires both the poisonous and healing elements to function: it must heal the body of the man while poisoning the lupus spirit. In this essay, I will argue that one cannot exist without the other – while the Aconite is the namesake of the potion, it is Moonwort that allows for this brew to function.

Wolfsbane, without Aconite, would not be able to suppress the lupus spirit – and without Myrrh, the potion would be lethal to all those who consume it.

According to Adino, in his 1862 publication Potiones Potentissima, Moonwort may also enhance the effects of a potion or individual ingredients. Though this has not been proven through any peer-reviewed research, it is important to note that some potioneers (i.e., Sharpsoar, 2001; Moltensurge, 1987) support this claim.

Hermione had subconsciously known all of this information, that is certain. However, as she skimmed the student's writing, the worn green potions book emerged from the back crevice of her mind, urging her to brush the dust off of its cover.

Moonwort.

She's almost disregarded it entirely, as she often does with binding agents. One of her academic faults that she doesn't like to admit to herself is that she often decides what information is important, and which is not with seemingly no reason whatsoever.

To Hermione, binding agents are more of a tool, rather than a core component when brewing.

But, as it turns out, Moonwort could be the key to the problem she and Draco had been facing.

They'd been focused on the Aconite for weeks now, certain that they would have to alter *something* about the floral ingredient to free the lupus spirit within those living with lycanthropy. It seemed almost impossible because if the aconite was absent or weakened, the spirit could take over, rendering the potion fruitless.

The potential solution now seems obvious, though this is perhaps why it had evaded them so easily.

Moonwort may also enhance the effects of a potion or individual ingredients.

As she read this sentence over for the fifth time, Hermione began to wonder if their attention should be turned instead toward the Moonwort, rather than the Aconite.

And so, as she observes the students attempting the brew, she's giddy with excitement at the possibility of finally having some answers.

Draco certainly hadn't been optimistic about this whole *involving the students* endeavour. However, as Professor Granger pulls him into his office after their class and casts both a locking and silencing charm, he finds he is actually quite on board with the idea.

"It was so obvious!" the witch exclaims as she turns toward him.

"I suppose you were right," Draco smirks, leaning back against his desk.

"Of course I was," she replies, as though this is an obvious fact. The witch continues to ramble, waving her hands animatedly as she paces. Draco is happy to observe, though he finds it increasingly hard to focus.

His body had reacted immediately to the witch's consecutive charms. Why cast a locking and silencing spell if not with the intention of a shag – or at least a snog?

Draco feels his breath hitch, and his heartbeat quickens at the sight of his witch. He loves when she goes off on a tangent, the ever-present fire within her burning slightly brighter than usual.

Merlin, he could really go for a shag right about now.

“That’s a brilliant idea, Granger,” he smiles, hoping that his plan will prove effective.

“Well, thank you,” she blushes, looking rather sheepish.

“You’re brilliant, did you know that?” he asks, his eyes remaining focused on the flush spreading across her cheeks. She twists a strand of hair, avoiding his gaze.

“I’ve always found your mind to be one of the most beautiful things about you, truthfully,” he continues, quite enjoying how flustered the witch is becoming.

She looks up at him, eyes wide. “Really?” she whispers, her tone one of disbelief.

“Of course, Granger,” he whispers, slowly approaching her. She remains silent, staring at the wizard before her.

Her eyes glisten, resembling the golden hue of the molten honey he drips into his tea each morning. Her chest is heavy as she continues to stare, a million thoughts swimming through her irises.

Draco delicately brings his hand toward her face, cupping her jaw as he drags his thumb across her flushed cheek.

Beautiful.

Hermione’s eyes blow wide, for Draco had not opened his mouth nor uttered a single word.

Don’t look so surprised, Granger.

She smiles, a warm sort of glow spreading through her mind.

You are breathtaking, Granger.

Draco continues to brush his thumb across her cheekbone, a small smile tugging at his lips.

I have to say, I’ll be fairly upset if you locked and silenced the door simply to ramble about wolfsbane.

Hermione rolls her eyes, secretly enjoying the wizard’s playfulness.

“Maybe I did,” she whispers.

You and I both know that isn’t the case.

Hermione had indeed locked the door with a purpose. Watching Draco teach while adorning his Professor robes was a positively religious experience in her mind. She’d felt ridiculous, practically salivating over the blonde brat, but the moment he’d begun to speak passionately about the appropriate stirring technique for the brew, she’d felt undoubtedly weak in the knees.

The air stills as her vision narrows in on the wizard next to her, her skin growing hot where his gaze lands. Energy swirls around them, pulsating with tension, each of them hyperaware of just how little space remains between them.

“Well, are you going to kiss me or not?” she asks, eyebrow raised.

The moment the last syllable escapes her lips, a smirk spreads across Draco’s lips. The expression is reminiscent of the spoiled brat Hermione had grown up with, one who had just got exactly what he wanted.

You’re the one who locked and silenced the room, Granger. I believe it should be you kissing me.

With yet another roll of her eyes, Hermione leans in closer, tilting her head upward. She forces herself to keep her eyes locked on his, quite enjoying the wisps of lust floating amongst the grey of his irises.

Minx.

The moment her face nears his, he allows his lips to come crashing into hers. Though her eyes are closed, she can feel the smile on his lips. She tosses her arms around his neck, pulling him closer, relishing in the feeling of pure and unadulterated *want* flowing through every inch of her being.

He bites at her lower lip playfully, wrapping his arms around her back and guiding her body toward him, her core now flush against his. Her breath catches, her mind growing delirious, her entire body on fire.

She’d fully been intending to keep things strictly professional with Draco while on Hogwarts grounds.

But.

There is something almost exciting about the possibility of, well, breaking the rules.

Hermione finds herself giddy at the prospect of what she knows will no doubt occur, her heart beating in her chest in anticipation.

No sooner have their lips met, does Draco wrap his arms around her, lifting her so that her legs pull tightly around his core. She buzzes in anticipation, peppering kisses along his neck and nipping at the space just below his jaw.

He groans, turning to lower her gently onto the desk behind them. She looks up at him curiously, her eyes locked on his figure as he approaches her.

The knowledge that this desk had once belonged to a long line of Hogwarts Potions Masters seeps its way into the forefront of his mind, but Draco is far too enthralled with the witch before him to care.

He stands against the table, parting her legs so that he can stand between her thighs. She leans back and places her hands behind her as she stares up at him in anticipation. Draco takes a moment to just look at her and appreciate the sight of Hermione Granger, laying back on *his desk* with her legs spread for him.

He leans over her, beginning to nip at her neck, his mind becoming hazier with every breathy moan she emits. He palms her chest, groaning as she arches her back in response. He drags his fingers down her arms, drawing runic inscriptions with the touch of a practiced scholar.

Pulling at her robes, he hikes them over her hips, leaving her black satin knickers fully on display. His breath catches, and he takes a step back to stare. Hermione fidgets under his gaze, feeling her arousal reach its crescendo.

Hermione adores just how erotic it feels to have a wizard's entire, undivided attention.

You're trying to kill me, Granger.

He approaches her once more, his chest heaving at the sight. Heavy breaths escape her lips as Draco trails his fingers between her thighs, teasing her as he drags a single finger across the satin of her knickers. His touch leaves her skin ablaze wherever he comes into contact with her.

Her back arches in anticipation. She begins to mumble various incoherent phrases under her breath, pleading her case, urging Draco to touch her wherever he pleases. He smirks as he dips his hand under the satin, inhaling a sharp breath as the evidence of her arousal meets his fingers.

You're magic, Granger.

He moves his fingers slowly toward her clit, beginning to circle gently around the bundle of nerves. Hermione writhes on the table, whispering a breathy "please."

Draco obliges immediately, quickening his pace and pressure. A moan is pulled from Hermione's throat, her hand flying toward her face to cover her mouth.

You silenced the room for a reason, Granger. I want to hear you.

He gently pulls her hand away from her mouth with his spare hand. She makes a whimpering sort of sound, one that causes Draco to see stars. He leans toward her, nipping at her neck with fervent need.

He feels his length twitch in anticipation, smirking as Hermione gasps as she feels the pressure against her thigh. "Fuck," she breathes, pulling his face closer to hers and nipping at his lower lip.

He pulls back with a grin, keeping his eyes locked on her as he lowers himself onto his knees, tossing her legs over his shoulders. His eyes grow dark with lust as he raises a single eyebrow in her direction, as if asking for permission.

She nods, tossing her head back with a frustrated breath. She feels his presence in her mind, the unmistakable feeling of calm a telltale sign.

Stop teasing me, she thinks, attempting to convey her desperation to him effectively without having to speak any words at all

Grinning, he pulls her in closer to him. As he grips her hips, he draws her knickers to the side, releasing a quiet moan as his eyes lock onto her sex. A split second later, he brings his tongue toward her, making use of slow, leisurely licks, allowing his tongue to linger on her clit. He revels in the way she starts to squirm, clearly frustrated by the pace he'd opted for.

Patience, Granger.

She groans in response, bringing her hand toward his head and gripping his hair. He concentrates his tongue on her bundle of nerves, flicking and nipping at it with a grin.

She gasps, her back arching as she pulls his face closer to her sex.

You're being so good for me, Granger.

She grinds herself against his tongue, her thighs shaking as she mumbles incoherently. Various expletives make their way out of her mouth, a sound that sends a jolt of satisfaction straight to Draco's cock.

Emboldened, he slides two fingers toward her slit, inserting his pointer finger and beginning to move it in a circular motion. He continues to lick and nip at her clit, growing delirious at the sounds she emits.

Draco has always taken great pride in his ability to guide Hermione Granger through the maze of pleasure, leaving her at a loss for words.

He inserts his middle finger next, quickening his pace and changing the angle ever so slightly, causing the witch to release a pleasure-filled moan, her voice almost unrecognisable. He continues to pump his fingers in and out of her at a punishing pace, groaning as he feels her walls clench.

Such a good girl.

His cock twitches as she moans in response, grinding her sex against his mouth.

"I'm - fuck, I'm close," she whines, her chest beginning to heave as her thighs quiver. Draco smiles as she twitches and writhes against his tongue, releasing a breathy moan as her head falls back against the ancient desk.

He peppers kisses up her thighs with a smile, eventually standing to hover over her. She continues to lie back, her eyes closed, her chest heaving.

"So much for professional," she mumbles.

"Whatever do you mean, Professor?" Draco asks, feigning confusion. "That was an excellent academic discussion, don't you think?"

She perks up at this, a smile making its way onto her lips. "Indeed it was, Professor Malfoy."

After many sleepless nights, Hermione and Draco send a proposal to Dr. Pyrites via owl. They had many hypotheses they thought would be worth testing.

Upon further research, Hermione stumbled upon a connection that only furthered her belief that moonwort could be the key variable they needed to modify.

In Alchemy, moonwort is considered the "white herb" prized by alchemists in the belief that it possesses a celestial vitality. It represents the white, or albedo, stage of the Great Work. The "white herb growing upon small mountains" is cited in the writings of Maria Prophetessa.

Hermione hopes that Professor Pyrites may have further insights on the matter.

A few short days later, just before the April full moon, a large tawny owl swoops into the Great Hall just as Draco is finishing his breakfast.

After offering the bird some of his remaining bacon, he accepts the letter, grinning as he realised who the sender had been.

He stands immediately, hastening out of the hall.

“Was that Professor Malfoy?” Joy gasps at the sight. Draco is certainly not one to hasten anywhere these days, much preferring a leisurely stroll or a saunter through the halls.

“Maybe Professor Granger asked him to meet her for a quickie in an alcove somewhere,” Daniel winks, receiving yet another whack across the head.

“Oi!” Cassie exclaims.

“You’re one to talk,” Daniel laughs, raising his eyebrow in Caitlyn’s direction.

As it turns out, Caitlyn and Cassie had been caught in a rather compromising position in an alcove just the night prior.

“You’re just jealous Evans,” Cassie retorts.

“So what if I am? At this rate, I’ll need to steal a time turner from the ministry so I can go back and shag Professor Granger when she would give me the time of day.”

Cassie scowls at this, positively detesting the boy’s brashness. “Evans, I hate to break it to you, but if you’re getting zero witches in 2007, you won’t be getting any in the nineties either.”

Daniel’s friends guffaw rather untowardly at their friends’ clear disapproval of this statement. Cassie, however, hadn’t missed the way the wizard had been staring at Celia all the while, no doubt trying to catch the witch’s attention.

She feels sorry for Daniel, for his inability to realise that Celia doesn’t dream of a brash and vulgar teenage boy and that he should likely alter his approach if this multi-year pining was to continue.

Draco barges into Hermione’s office, not sparing her availability a single thought.

“Malfoy!” she exclaims, startled at his sudden appearance.

Without a word, he breathlessly thrusts the letter toward her with a grin. He watches with rapt attention as the witch skins the parchment, her eyes growing wide as she reaches the end.

“He wants to know if our research participant would be willing to try....” she begins, her train of thought taking off at an impossible pace, attempting to piece together the logistics of it all. “In three days! The full moon is in three days!”

Malfoy nods, for he’d had the same realisation while hastening through the halls.

Raising her eyebrow, Hermione stands and leaves her office. She doesn’t check that Draco is following her, because she knows he will.

The pair arrive at the Defence Against The Dark Arts Classroom, barging into Remus’s cosy office.

“Remus!” Hermione exclaims, thrusting the letter in his direction.

By now, Remus is quite accustomed to Hermione’s sudden excited outbursts and has learned it’s usually best to take them in stride – a nod, and ask questions later.

His eyes grow wide in a similar fashion to hers, his irises clouding over ever so slightly.

A beat later, he nods.

“I’ll do it.”

April 2nd, 2007, Godric’s Hollow

Three days later, Draco and Hermione arrive by Portkey to a secret location, one that had been given to them by Sirius only a few hours prior. The original plan had been to use the grounds of Malfoy Manor for the trial, but Sirius had assured them this location was far more comfortable for their Lupine friend. Hermione still wasn’t quite clear as to why the secrecy was necessary, but she had no plans to deny Sirius Black his dramatics.

Hermione glances around as they land, leaving her hand entwined with Draco’s. “Draco,” she whispers. “I think we’re in Godric’s Hollow.”

Sure enough, as they approach the fountain in the centre of the square, the looming figure of Godric Gryffindor smiles down at them, offering them a wink. Hermione smiles at the sight, dragging Draco through the square toward Potter Manor.

Sirius emerges with a grin on his face, “there are my two favourite star-crossed lovers!”

As they enter the cosy home, Draco finds himself wishing that the Manor he’d grown up in could have evoked a similar sensation. His childhood home is cold and harsh, riddled with centuries worth of dark magic. The Potter manor, however, renders him immediately calm.

“Mione!” Harry smiles, and a smiling Lily latched onto his back. “Mione!” Lily echoes.

“Potter,” Draco nods.

“Malfoy.”

The pair stare at one another for a moment, both feeling equally awkward about the whole ordeal.

“Cuppa?” Harry asks, gesturing toward the sunny kitchen.

“Please.”

Professor Pyrites arrives a few moments later through the floo, no doubt shocked by the eight people staring back at him. Hermione raises her eyebrow quizzically, and opens her mouth, turning to Sirius.

“Yes Mione?” he asks with a devilish grin.

“Why were Draco and I unable to floo here, might I ask?”

“Pardon me for providing you with a romantic adventure,” the wizard grins, running his hand through his greying curls.

As the sky darkens and the light of the full moon casts a welcome glow around the group, Draco shivers.

His last encounter with a fully transformed werewolf had been less than desirable, especially since the beast had stalked through the halls of his home, growling at any who crossed his path.

He knows that Remus is different, that he fights to keep the lupus spirit at bay, rather than embracing it entirely, but he can't help but worry.

Hermione anxiously paces around her work, muttering under her breath as she verifies the placement of all aspects for the fifteenth time. The square salt formation had been measured with care, assuring that it was perfectly equal on all sides. A straight line was drawn down the middle with moonwort-infused salt. Two additional lines sprout from the bottom, forming a fork-like formation. Finally, two thinner lines, infused with Black Quicksilver and Myrrh, extend from the right side of the square.

A purple aconite flower blooms where the shapes come to meet, the moonlight glistening off of its petals.

“Ms. Granger,” Dr. Pyrites smiles.

“It is perfect.”

Hermione nods, continuing to pace nonetheless.

Both Hermione and Dr. Pyrites would be performing the alchemical ritual while Harry, Sirius and Draco stand by, should something go awry. Remus had begged them to practice no restraint whatsoever, should a full transformation occur. Hermione hopes that the three wizards – each who cares for the man in their own way – would be able to oblige if needed.

Remus sits in the centre of the salt, a vial of their modified wolfsbane potion in hand. In the end, Dr. Pyrites agreed with Hermione's hypotheses.

The potion had been prepared with a slight twist – instead of adding simple Myrrh, Hermione had prepared a brew of Myrrh and Moonwort, the plant strengthening the healing properties of Myrrh substantially. They predicted that by adding this Myrrh to the mix, the disparity between its potency and the aconites should allow for the human to heal at a faster rate than the lupus spirit is poisoned.

Hermione feels a creeping sensation of inadequacy creeping up on her. This had been her hypothesis – what if she was wrong? What if this actually rendered the Myrrh useless, thereby poisoning Remus? What if Remus encountered his first full transformation in years because of her failure?

Many thoughts race through her mind, so much so that she's worried she might cry.

She inhales deeply, her breath steadying as a hand meets her neck, a thumb rubbing assuring patterns against her skin. She knows it's Draco. His presence has always had a calming effect on

him. She's forever thankful for just how easily the wizard seems to notice her cues, seeking to remedy her overthinking almost immediately.

The group waits in silence, each growing more anxious with every moment that passes. However, as the moon reaches its peak, Remus downs the vial of the modified wolfsbane potion. Draco watches in horror as Remus's transformation occurs. Apart from himself and Dr. Pyrites, all the others present had previously witnessed the phenomenon, slightly more prepared for the horrifying process.

His bones shift and crack at unnatural angles, his spine constricting as his head snaps back. Hermione has to do everything in her power from slamming her eyes shut, the sight evoking the unquestionable sensation of fright.

She knows better than to be frightened by Remus, but with the current circumstances, she can't seem to help it.

Once the transformation has completed, all those present hold their breath. In the next moment, Remus will either give them the decided-upon signal – a thumbs up – or break out of the alchemical formation and be stunned.

Time seems to pass slowly, each millisecond flowing at a glacial pace until, finally, the wolf offers a hesitant thumbs up.

Hermione's emotions surge, and the tears she'd held back break free..

While this had only been the first portion of the ritual, she remains thankful that she hadn't poisoned Remus, nor caused him to undergo a full transformation.

Wiping her eyes, she sets to work, summoning any and all courage she can muster.

First, she strikes a match and lights the formation, the exterior barrier beginning to emit a light ember. As the flames continue to build and grow, she takes a deep breath, watching as they approach the purple aconite flower. The poisonous bloom starts to sizzle, launching her into action.

She begins the first spell, chanting as she waves her wand.

"Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vabor."

Remus's pulse quickens the moment the words leave her lips, his entire body beginning to twitch. He worries for a moment that perhaps this ritual should never have been attempted.

From behind him, Dr. Pyrites replicates her motions, chanting in unison.

"Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vabor."

She waves her wand, tracing the vinewood in the lupine formation. Her brow grows moist with perspiration, and her jaw clenched.

Draco feels his heartbeat quicken. He trusts the witch, of course, but this ritual is unlike anything he'd ever heard of, let alone seen. He'd witnessed how draining his ritual had been for her. He didn't want her to exhaust herself to the point of injury today.

His witch.

She's far too giving.

He admires her Gryffindor spirit, but still worries. Her whole life, she's been happy to whittle away at herself, handing out pieces of her soul to those who need it without paying any mind to how it might be affect her.

"Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor," the two alchemists continue to chant, moving around the formation, waving their wands – unblinking.

Remus's body continues to contort, and Draco has no doubt in his mind that it's the lupus spirit attempting to emerge.

"Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor," she repeats, her voice becoming louder and more assured with each chant.

"INVOCO TE, MAGNE LUPE SPIRITUS, UT ME EX HAC ANIMA ERUAS, ET ITERUM VAGOR!"

Remus's entire body trembles, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. He can feel his soul within his own body, his existence pulsating as his lupus spirit thrashes.

"INVOCO TE, MAGNE LUPE SPIRITUS, UT ME EX HAC ANIMA ERUAS, ET ITERUM VAGOR!" the alchemists yell. Hermione blinks, attempting to see despite the tears blinding her.

The wolf continues to spasm, his limbs moving of their own accord. But suddenly, he stills.

Hermione watches, eyes wide as the wolf stands, his height towering over her. He releases a soft whimper before its gaze lands on the witch, staring her down.

The wolf shakes its head.

Hermione collapses onto the ground, her chest heaving as she sobs. Draco throws himself onto the ground next to her, pulling her body flush against hers, attempting to soothe her.

It takes well over a half-hour to calm the witch, to assure her that she'd done her best. She clings to Draco as though her life depends on it, her mind whirring in the wake of her failure.

"You can't save everyone, Hermione, especially not if it means destroying yourself in the process," Draco whispers, breathing in the comforting scent of strawberries and vanilla.

She looks up at him, her eyes blurry.

"I know," she whispers.

As Harry, Hermione, Draco and Dr. Pyrites make their way back into the Potter Manor, Hermione turns to Sirius with a concerned expression.

"Why here?" she whispers.

"We used to come out here when we were kids, in the summer. Prongs, Wormtail and I would transform to keep him company, just like at school. He was always happiest when he could run free through the forest, rather than being cooped up in that rickety old shack."

Hermione nods, finding herself growing rather emotional.

“I wanted him to be comfortable if the transformation did occur. He’s older now... and well... I can’t bear to see him in pain.”

With that, Sirius transforms into Padfoot, racing off into the forest to find his Moony.

When Hermione and Draco return to Hogwarts later that evening, Hermione happily allows Draco to follow her into her quarters.

As the light of the full moon peeks through the window, illuminating the pair in a soft glow. They remain silent, communicating thousands of words through their stares alone.

Eventually, Hermione’s eyes grow tired, the scent of parchment, grass, and peppermint lulling her to sleep.

Courage & Craft

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I apologize again for the delay, my life has been so incredibly hectic lately and writing had to be put on the backburner for a little while. This fic will NOT be abandoned, my posting schedule may just be slightly slower. Thank you again for all of your support and words of encouragement, I am so thankful for each and every one of you.

As always, beta love to whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished ♡

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Potter Manor had been hidden away from searching eyes for many years before the last remaining Potter claimed it once more. It had been Hermione who had discovered its existence.

After the dust from the war settled, both Harry and Hermione had been handed a key to the Wizarding Archives. Hermione had long dreamt of the ancient halls within the ministry, accessible only to those granted access. Her key had been handed to her by a smiling Kingsley Shacklebolt, a welcome perk of her Order of Merlin, First Class. Harry, while also a recipient of this accolade, received his as the heir of the Potter fortune.

It had been a crisp autumn morning when Hermione had arrived at Grimmauld Place, a cup of coffee in hand, adamant about dragging her oldest friend through the centuries of knowledge now at their disposal.

“Mione, the old books will still be there in three hours,” Harry groaned, pulling his covers up over his head to shield himself from her excitement.

“Don’t you want to know more about your past, Harry?” Hermione exclaimed. “There is information on every single relative of yours since the dawn of time!”

Harry bit his tongue, not wanting to snap at his friend. “Okay Mione, I’ll be ready in ten.”

The Archives had been even more breathtaking than Hermione had ever imagined. The glass-domed ceiling allowed for the bright morning light to seep through. Scholarly elves wandered through the shelves, reshelving and summoning files in a meticulous fashion.

For a moment, Hermione had allowed herself to stand still and take in the space around her, tipping her head back and exhaling deeply.

“It’s beautiful,” she smiled.

A very groggy and dishevelled Harry followed her through the shelves until they arrived at the POTTER section of the archive. Hermione lights up at the sight, summoning the scroll containing his family tree. The family motto *Animo et astutia* – from courage and craft – sparkled back at her.

After what felt like hours to Harry, but only mere moments to Hermione, they stumbled upon an old black and white photograph of a large stately home – *The Potter Manor* inscribed on the back of the image in perfect cursive.

“Potter Manor?” Harry exclaimed, suddenly much more awake than he had been a split second prior.

Without missing a beat, Hermione summoned a large tomb from the top shelf. She opens the book in quite a frenzy, flipping haphazardly through the pages until she finds what she had evidently been looking for.

“Potter Manor,” she whispered. “It’s in Godric’s Hollow.”

After consulting with two unspeakables, a sour old woman from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and two Gringotts Goblins, it was determined that the Potter Manor was very much still in existence, but simply under heavy undetectable enchantments.

A few short hours later, the pair apparated to a seemingly barren plot of land on the outskirts of Godric’s Hollow, a cursebreaker in tow.

When the stately home was finally revealed, Harry had remained silent, gawking at the sight.

Though it is technically classified as a Manor, the ancestral home had a welcoming sort of feeling to it. The Potter estate was built of stone and covered in vines weaving their way toward the roof. Beautiful gardens, shrubs and trees surrounded the property.

“According to records, this is where your father was raised,” Hermione whispered. She noticed a small tear making its way down her friend’s cheek, offering only a light squeeze of the hand before guiding him inside.

As the ancient door swung open, Harry and Hermione were greeted by an enormous staircase that takes up the centre of the room, one of those that’s essentially two normal staircases wide. Various pieces of colourful artwork with seemingly no theme line the walls, a stark contrast against the pale and muted elegance present in the rest of the room. Hermione wondered if Harry’s grandmother had perhaps been an artist of some kind.

The pair continued silently through the house towards the kitchen, a sunny room with domed window ceilings and a large table down the centre. It reminded her of Grimmauld Place in a way, though perhaps a distant cousin of the dark and dreary home, rather than a sibling.

The formal dining room was positively breathtaking, and Hermione couldn’t help but feel her heart clench at the childhood Harry had been robbed of—that so many had been robbed of.

A large oak table commands the attention of the room with an impressive chandelier reflecting the light from the windows around the space, creating rainbows on the walls. The walls are almost shockingly tall, and the ceiling has some kind of muggle painting on it, one that seemed weirdly familiar to Hermione.

Now, many years later, much of Potter Manor remains unchanged. Harry had been adamant that they preserve the home, though he, Ginny and the triplets had certainly made the space *theirs*. Each room of the estate had a different sort of theme, each paying homage to a place the family holds dear.

The living room is practically the Gryffindor Common Room reincarnated, with gold and red tapestries and plush sofas lining the space.

The kitchen is The Burrow, plain and simple. Mismatched chairs and appliances fill the room, and books and other trinkets are stacked in peculiar places.

Though she finds the lack of continuity slightly jarring, Hermione adores the Potter home. While Hermione has a flat of her own for the summer months, it remains empty as most of her time is spent at Ginny and Harry's. They've offered her a room of her own on multiple occasions, but her pride is far too fierce to allow her to accept such an offer.

Nonetheless, she finds it comforting to be around a family.

And so, as she and Draco walk up the laneway hand in hand, Hermione smiles.

It had taken much less convincing than she'd originally anticipated for Draco to agree to this dinner. Hermione had been ready to grovel – make a bargain even. But, it was the first time she asked that he happily agreed.

The minute the muted red door swings open, Hermione is bombarded by three very rambunctious Potter children. "Auntie Mione!" Lily screams, pushing her brothers aside to reach her aunt.

"Hi Lils," Hermione smiles, reaching down to hoist the tiny witch up into a hug.

"I got new books at the library today!" Lily exclaims with a grin.

"What about?"

"The Goblin Revolutions!" the redhead smiles.

Draco's eyes go wide at this, shocked by the passion the small witch evidently holds for the topic. He feels a tug at the end of his cuffed oxford, a small curly-haired boy peering up at him.

"Oh, er, hello," he says, suddenly feeling rather awkward.

"Hi," the boy blushes.

"Oh! Freddie, this is my friend Draco." Hermione smiles.

Draco swallows – the child's name a harsh slap across his face. It seems to be a frequent occurrence when in the presence of the Weasleys. He feels the bile begin to build at the back of his throat, his pulse quickening ever so slightly.

"You're very handsome," Lily observes, her eyes locked on his face.

Hermione giggles as a smile spreads across her face and Draco suddenly feels his chest lighten.

"He is, isn't he," Hermione whispers to the girl.

Harry stands in the kitchen with three beads of sweat on his brow. His ever-tousled hair is noticeably more messy than usual, his wireframe glasses fogged from the steam spiralling out of the large pot before him.

He mumbles to himself, tasting the stew with the wooden spoon before adding in a pinch of salt. Behind him, Ginny sits on the counter with that week's edition of Witch Weekly in one hand and a glass of pumpkin juice in the other.

Three children come barrelling into the space, two smiling adults in tow.

"Mum!" James yells.

"Auntie Mione is here!" Freddie adds.

"And a handsome man!" Lily cheers.

The spoonful of soup that had just been tasted by Harry is then spat out at the declaration, his eyes growing wide.

Ginny bursts into laughter, her glass of pumpkin juice nearly sloshing over the edge of her glass. "Hello Auntie Mione and Handsome Man," she grins, mock wiping tears from her eyes.

"Dinner should be ready in a few minutes," Harry adds, turning his attention back to the bubbling pot of stew. While he knows that their childhood rivalry has long dissipated into history, he still feels peculiar about welcoming Draco into his home — and hearing his little girl refer to him as... handsome.

The meal passes exactly as any good dinner party should, with plenty of laughter, marvellous food, and genuine smiles. Hermione has always wished that she could bottle that feeling – the one you feel when you've had a drink or two, your belly full both with laughter and food. She finds herself almost growing delirious as she smiles at those she loves, the room emitting a warm glow around her.

She's certain that her heart is bursting at the seams, her love spilling out in a thousand directions, attempting to envelop those present at the table in a warm hug.

"We have some news," Ginny smiles, glancing at her husband.

"Oh?" Hermione asks, perking up.

The married couple stares at one another with matching grins, Harry's eyes growing slightly hazy.

"I'm pregnant," Ginny smiles, tears welling in her eyes.

"Shut up!" Hermione yells, standing so abruptly that her chair topples over behind her. "Gin!" she exclaims as she rushes around the table to her friend, enveloping her in a hug from behind, practically suffocating the poor witch.

"How far along are you?" Hermione asks, already doing some mental math.

"Five months!" Ginny exclaims, pulling her jumper up to reveal a bump.

Hermione gasps at the sight.

"Don't worry, I had a notice-me-not charm on it," Ginny smiles devilishly.

“Why!” Hermione exclaims.

“Well, it’s Tonks’ first pregnancy. I didn’t want to pull any attention away from her you know?” Ginny smiles, rubbing her belly with her palm.

“My cousin is pregnant?” Draco asks, speaking for the first time in several minutes.

“Yeah, she’s due any day now, actually,” Harry replies.

Draco nods, his mind whirring. Though Andromeda and his mother had reconnected after the war, he himself had made no effort whatsoever to connect with his estranged family.

It’s not that he hadn’t wanted to – because he certainly had – but rather he hadn’t viewed it as a priority. Now, however, he realises that perhaps it should have been.

Growing up, he had been told that he was the sole heir of both the Black and Malfoy families, something he had once been proud of. Now, however, he’s glad that he isn’t.

Andromeda had officially been magically linked to the House of Black once more after the war — meaning that any of her descendants are as well.

He suddenly has the overwhelming desire to become acquainted with his cousin, especially with the next generation of the House of Black on the way.

He glances at Hermione, who happens to already be looking in his direction.

“Maybe we can go visit?” she whispers.

He nods, happy that she had suggested they visit as a cumulative pair.

After the triplets have been put to bed, Hermione, Draco, Ginny and Harry make their way to the garden. String lights hang from the veranda, vines weaving their way up the wooden beams. With the flick of her wand, Ginny lights various candles and pours fresh glasses of wine, and pumpkin juice for herself.

Hermione happily cosies up onto the sofa, beckoning Draco to join her on the seat next to her. He lowers himself onto the cushions with a smile, quite enjoying the ease and comfort of the evening.

Growing up, dinner parties and social interactions as a whole were not something he enjoyed in the slightest. Pureblood social gatherings are stuffy, scripted, and stressful in his opinion.

He always felt as if everyone knew exactly what they were going to reply before you even asked your question, each word meticulously curated. The questions are another problem altogether because, while they may seem genuine, most purebloods are trying to discover any material that could be used as leverage in the future.

He thought he was perhaps antisocial, but, as it turns out, he just didn’t enjoy being *that* kind of social.

No, Draco much prefers being social in this way, strewn across a sofa in the Potter’s garden, a glass of wine in hand, and his witch tucked by his side.

As the hour grows late, Harry suddenly stands, raises his eyebrow and beckons for Draco to follow him. With a grimace, the blonde wizard obliges.

Hermione and Ginny watch as the pair walk away, turning to one another with matching grins.

“Is Harry about to give him *the talk*?” Hermione giggles.

“Yes, I caught him practicing in the mirror this morning,” Ginny smirks.

“Oh Godric,” Hermione rolls her eyes.

“He’s feeling particularly fatherly these days with baby number four on the way,” Ginny smiles, staring lovingly at her belly.

“I’m so happy for you both,” Hermione gushes, though she feels a pang of *something* in her abdomen.

“Do you think you and the ferret will…” Ginny starts, trailing off with a wink.

“Maybe someday,” Hermione replies sheepishly, avoiding her friend’s gaze. “We have a few steps to take before then.”

“Nonsense, you can get knocked up whenever,” Ginny grins.

“We talked about it,” Hermione whispers.

“Recently?”

“Before.”

March 22, 2001, King Street, Oxford

“Do you want children someday?”

The question hangs suspended in the air for a moment, the individual morphemes that compose the word flickering before they disappear into nothingness.

“I think so,” Draco replies.

“How many?”

“Two.”

“Me too,” Hermione nods. “It’s lonely when you’re an only child.”

Draco remains silent, staring at the speckled ceiling above them.

“Maybe one boy and one girl,” Hermione continues, rolling over to face the man next to her, twisting the duvet with her.

“You can’t pick, Granger,” Draco replies, fighting the smile that so badly wants to emerge.

“I’ll do as I please,” she smiles, reaching her pinky towards his hand and intertwining it around his.

“They’ll attend muggle primary school of course,” she adds a beat later, mostly to gauge his reaction.

“Why?”

“So they have a basic understanding of science and maths. The curriculum for magical folks is severely lacking.”

Draco turns to face her with a questioning scowl. But, slowly, as the seconds pass, it fades. “Okay.”

“It’s settled then,” she giggles, burying her face in his chest.

April 14, 2007, The Potter Manor

The two wizards weave through the back garden, walking in silence through what appears to be a small-scale farm. Draco tries not to be distracted by the hens roaming about.

“Did you need my advice, Potter?” he asks, growing anxious with every moment of silence that passes.

“No, actually.”

Draco frowns.

“I just wanted to speak with you about Hermione.”

“Oh?”

“Hermione is like a sister to me, mate. I’m sure you understand,” Harry begins, kicking at the loose rocks beneath his feet.

Draco remains silent.

“I just want to make sure that you don’t intend to break her heart again. I don’t think she’ll be able to go through that again.”

Draco feels his breath catch, his stew suddenly moving about in his stomach.

“I can tell you care for one another very much, and I’m happy for you both. But please, Malfoy, please be absolutely certain that you’re ready for a life with her because I can’t watch her go through another heartbreak.”

Draco nods. Though Harry’s incessant need to involve himself in his business does perturb him to a certain extent, he also appreciates the sentiment.

“I have every intention of staying by Granger’s side until I take my last breath of natural causes or she Avadas me, whatever comes first.”

A small smile makes its way onto Harry’s lips. “You’re certain?”

“Yes Potter, I’ve been fighting tooth and nail to get back in her good graces. I don’t intend to bugger that up. She’s it for me — she...” he trails off. “She’s always been the one for me, and I know I made a mess of things last time, but I’m ready now. I’ll be clinging onto her until I’m old and grey, as long as she’ll have me.”

“Okay,” Harry nods, clapping his hand on Draco’s shoulder. “Good.”

And with that, the childhood enemies turned reluctant friends make their way back to their witches.

A few days later, Professor Granger is beckoned into the Headmistress's office shortly after dinner. There at the desk – hair wild – is a very frenzied-looking Elizabeth.

“Miss Beverly,” Hermione smiles, hesitantly entering the space. The moment she shuts the door behind her, however, it comes swinging open once more. She jumps out of the way, hoping to avoid a rather unfortunate collision with the ancient wood.

Professor Malfoy sweeps into the room, his robes billowing behind him in a way that would rival his godfather. Hermione has to do everything in her power to stifle a laugh.

“Headmistress,” he nods. “Professor Granger,” he smirks.

“Yes, thank you both for joining me this evening,” Minerva begins. “There has been an incident...” she continues, glancing at the small witch. “Would you care to explain what occurred?”

Elizabeth remains silent, her eyes focused on the wooden desk before her. Hermione feels her heart clench at the sight, the normally hyperactive girl evidently deeply affected by whatever had transpired. The professor crouches next to the witch, offering her a kind smile.

Elizabeth raises her gaze ever so slightly, a single tear making its way down her cheek. “He called me a mudblood,” she whispers.

Hermione’s eyes go wide as she instinctively pulls the girl into a hug. “I’m so sorry,” she whispers.

As Draco watches Hermione comfort the witch, he feels his breathing constrict.

“He called me a mudblood.”

He hears the words echo through the room, the syllables bouncing off of the walls, the voice eventually transforming into that of another.

“You filthy mudblood.”

Though he doesn’t realise it, Professor McGonagall keeps a close eye on him as he processes what had occurred.

He wrings his hands nervously, his chest tight and jaw clenched.

Draco Malfoy is well aware of the fact that Hermione has long forgiven him for his transgressions as a child, but allowing his mind to wander and stumble upon those memories still makes him feel positively vile.

The reminders of his remarks act as a slap across the face, rendering him mute, unable to put into words just how awful he feels for the words he'd spoken. He knows he deserves it, the debilitating sickness it causes him.

But for some reason, as he stares at the tiny witch seated before him, his mind allows him a sliver of an opportunity – to make amends.

He crouches down on her other side, offering her a smile of his own. “And what did you say back?” he asks.

“I punched him,” the girl whispers.

The wizard summons a tin box from somewhere in the room, catching it with the practiced hand of a seeker before opening it for the Slytherin witch. “Have a biscuit, Miss Beverly,” he smiles.

After hearing the full and unabridged story of what had occurred – a good-natured quidditch debate turned... not so good-natured – Draco makes his way down to the dungeons once more.

Hermione remains, taking Elizabeth's hand in hers.

“Elizabeth,” she begins, pausing for a moment to ensure that the girl is listening. “You are such a talented witch,” she smiles.

The small girl looks up at her with a teary sort of expression, a biscuit crumb on her lip.

Hermione's mind spins, the words she'd wanted to hear so badly as a young girl suddenly spilling out of her mouth.

“You are so brave, Elizabeth. You embarked on a journey unlike any other, leaving all that is familiar and comforting behind. You did it because you knew that there was *more*, more to this existence than you were able to see before. And when you arrived, everything was likely strange and somewhat uncomfortable at times, but you still felt this overwhelming sense of belonging. Is that correct?”

The small girl nods, wiping a tear from her eye.

“Because you do belong here, Elizabeth, just as much as anyone else who is a student here. You have magic in your veins and the capability to wield it. You are powerful, Elizabeth, just as much as any pureblood witch or wizard.”

The girl smiles hesitantly, nodding once more.

“While things are certainly improving in the wizarding world, they are far from perfect. But know this, Elizabeth. I am so proud of you, for everything that you are. And if you take anything away from your time at Hogwarts, even one small tidbit of information, I want it to be this.” Hermione pauses once more, taking a deep breath.

“You are worthy, Elizabeth, of the magic that flows through you. The magic that resides within us has been around since the dawn of time and will continue to thrive long after both you and I are gone. I have a theory that magic chooses people. It isn't ad hoc or random that you are a witch, Elizabeth. You and magic are intrinsically linked. You are made of it. So even if someone tries to

convince you that you are lesser than others, know that you are just as much magic as you are a muggle, and that is such a beautiful thing. So many witches and wizards only live a half-life, and their experience is only *half* of what is out there. But you have access to both, Elizabeth. You *see* what they cannot. And that in and of itself is a very magical thing, is it not?"

Elizabeth smiles, her cheeks flushed. "I know."

Hermione stands, satisfied with her monologue.

"I'm proud to be a muggleborn," Elizabeth adds.

"You should be," Hermione smiles.

"I'm proud to be just like you, Professor Granger."

"Mister Avery," Draco bellows into the Slytherin common room, all those present falling eerily silent.

"He's in the corner, sir," a girl says, pointing at the back of the room.

There sits the young wizard, his face pointed in the direction of the wall.

"Cassie put him in a time-out," another student adds.

With a curt nod, Professor Malfoy approaches the boy. He clears his throat, the wizard turning toward him with a look of fear in his eyes.

"Mister Avery, follow me," Draco says, turning to leave with no doubt in his mind that the boy would follow.

The moment the door to his office has been closed, Draco gestures to the chair across from him. "Mister Avery, might you be able to tell me why I've asked you to join me in my office this evening?"

The boy remains silent, his eyes glued to his feet.

"Mister Avery?" Draco prods, his tone stern.

"For what I said to Elizabeth," the boy whispers.

"Speak up."

"For what I said to Elizabeth," the boy repeats, this time slightly more assured.

"And what might that be?" Draco asks, feigning a genuine question.

"Sir?" the boy asks, confused. Surely his professor does not want him to repeat the word?

"What did you say to Miss Beverly?" Draco asks, sitting back and crossing his arms across his chest.

The boy bites his tongue, unable to speak the word.

“Interesting,” Draco drawls.

“Sir?”

“Well, it’s interesting that you are unable to repeat the word for me. That suggests that you know it’s derogatory and wrong.”

The boy nods.

“So why did you say it?”

“I didn’t mean it,” the boy replies.

“Doesn’t matter, does it? It means something to her regardless of your intent.”

The boy frowns, evidently uncomfortable.

“So why did you say it?”

“She makes me so angry.”

“Why?”

The boy opens his mouth to speak before quickly snapping it shut.

“Say it,” Draco commands.

“Because she’s a know-it-all SWOT,” the boy spits.

“Is she?” Draco asks. “Or is she just doing better than you?”

The boy’s eyes go wide at this, his face twitching ever so slightly.

“Let me guess,” Draco begins, standing and walking around the desk. “Your parents raised you to believe that you deserve everything handed to you on a silver platter. That you are somehow more deserving of success because of the last name you were assigned at birth?”

The question remains unanswered, but Draco persists. “I have some news for you, Mister Avery, so do pay attention.”

The boy looks up, his hands quivering at his side.

“Miss Beverly is a brilliant witch, not in spite of her birth, but because of it. Muggleborn witches and wizards are powerful individuals, ones who are just as worthy of success in this world as those that were born into it.”

The boy looks to his feet once more, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

“Now, why does Miss Beverly make you angry?” Draco asks.

“Because she’s doing better than me,” the boy whispers.

“Yes. Miss Beverly is an exceptional witch, one who will no doubt do great things. Perhaps you should work on befriending her, rather than ostracising her because I can tell you better than

anyone that life is far too short to hide from things that make you angry. Anger is simply fear polyjuiced, Mister Avery. You are scared of her because she makes you question everything you were raised to believe. You are scared of her because, for the first time in your life, you are unsure of your worthiness. Do not fall prey to the curse that has plagued far too many generations of Purebloods.”

The boy nods, tears in his eyes.

“You will apologise to Miss Beverly. Tonight.”

The boy nods once more.

“You will be serving detention for the next four weeks.”

Mister Avery opens his mouth to protest, but Draco continues, effectively silencing him.

“And if I ever hear that you have used this word again, whether you *mean it* or not, the punishment will be far, *far* worse.”

In the hall, Professor Granger holds her hand to her chest, tears welling in her eyes. Interestingly, after accompanying Elizabeth back to her common room, the only person she’d wanted to see had been her own childhood antagonist.

But as she’d paused at the door, and heard the words that he had spoken, she knows that this desire had been for good reason.

Draco’s sneer had evolved into a genuine smile quite some time ago – a fact that likely caused many of his ancestors to roll over in their graves. But, Hermione knows that the cycle of hatred and prejudice is ever-present, and Draco doing his best to stick his foot in its path – attempting to weaken and break it is more than she could ever ask for.

Merlin, she loves that prat.

Chapter End Notes

The chapter title & the Potter Manor was inspired by The Debt of Time by ShayaLonnie :)

Dream & Remember

Chapter Notes

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY MY LOVES!

This is a chapter I was excited to write since the beginning, enjoy!

You may have noticed that the chapter count was changed from 42 to 40 - this is simply because I do not want this story to drag on unnecessarily. That means we have 8 chapters to go (the last two will be shorter epilogues).

Thank you all for your patience, comments and kudos, I appreciate you all sm ♥

As always, beta love ♥ to whits_end, likelyunfinished, and callcalypso, this fic would not be what it is today without them.

“I wonder if anybody does anything at Oxford but dream and remember, the place is so beautiful. One almost expects the people to sing instead of speaking. It is all like an opera.” – WB Yeats

Oxford has long been thought of as a city with magic embedded in its very foundation. The city seems to hum with knowledge, whispers of scholars both past and present twisting and turning through the cobbled streets. Even muggles can sense that there is something *different* about this ancient city, though none have ever been able to pinpoint exactly what that might be.

Hermione has always felt a special connection with the city – her heart longing for it long before she’d ever stepped foot within its boundaries. Now, though her time as an inhabitant of Oxford has come to pass, she often finds herself visiting the city within her dreams.

Luna had once explained the foreign concept of astrocartography, her eyes glowing as she informed Hermione of her divine connection with the city. Allegedly, her Sun, Venus, and Jupiter all cross through Oxford, a fact that Luna had been extremely excited about.

“You’ll be your happiest there, Hermione,” the witch assured her during their eighth year.

Hermione had smiled kindly, already disregarding Luna’s words. But, as she’d begun to live her life in Oxford, she’d realised that perhaps the blonde witch had been onto something after all.

Simply put, her life had felt easier while she’d called Oxford home. Her anxieties had settled, her heart opening up to new opportunities that she would have never considered before. She genuinely looked forward to the days that were to come, the current that carried her forward far smoother than it had once been.

She sometimes wonders if she could retire to Oxford, perhaps in a small flat in the centre of the city. She longs for the cobbled streets, the ancient libraries, and the dreary weather.

She misses their park and their coffee shop.

Even while they had split ways, she missed the city not only for what it is but for what had transpired within its walls. It had felt like a sanctuary of sorts, to fall in love in a city that seemed to want nothing more than for them to stumble and fall into one another's outstretched arms.

But Hermione's dreams never fail her, her subconscious always transporting her back to the city she holds so dear. So, when she opens her eyes, her hand still tightly clasped in Draco's, she smiles. Because momentarily, she's certain that she may have fallen asleep and drifted into the land of the unconscious.

"Is this?" she whispers.

"Your flat?" he smiles. "Yes."

"How?"

Draco remains silent, suddenly shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"Draco..." she smiles.

"I bought the whole building," he admits, avoiding her gaze.

"Draco!" she exclaims, her mouth agape. "Why?"

"Well, as a business investment mostly," he begins, walking around the space. "But also because I always hoped we could come back here someday."

Hermione grins, happily walking through her old flat. "I cannot believe you, Draco Malfoy," she giggles, tossing her arms around his neck and pulling his face towards her.

Truthfully, this is also Draco's first time returning to the flat since his departure all those years ago. He'd dealt with all the negotiations via floo, the building maintained by staff that he pays quite handsomely. He had promised himself that he would only ever return under one condition – if Hermione was accompanying him.

Visiting Professor Bates was the perfect excuse to return. Quite frankly, Draco had been eager to drag Hermione back to where it all began ever since their first kiss but had hesitated for whatever reason. He wanted their return to be perfect, and that is exactly what he intended to make happen that very weekend.

Suddenly, Hermione's features twist into a devilish sort of grin, raising her eyebrows in a way that makes his stomach twist and turn. "How much time do we have?" she asks.

"One hour," he replies, his tone slightly breathier than intended.

"Perfect," she grins, taking his hand in hers and dragging him to the bedroom.

Draco finds himself unable to wipe the smirk off of his face as they take the familiar route to Professor Bates' office. His mind feels like it's regressed ever so slightly, his fourteen-year-old self suddenly in charge of his inhibitions. He forces himself to think of something – anything so that he can take their meeting as seriously as he must.

His Grandma Druella.

Filch's bare arse.

Alas, nothing seems to stop his heart from pounding, the very presence of his witch enough to render him positively delirious.

"Draco?" he hears, causing him to snap out of his cursed trance.

"Yes?" he asks.

"We're here," Hermione smiles.

Sure enough, vine-covered stone stares back at them, the air slightly humid, suggesting the inevitability of a torrential downpour within the next few minutes.

"Shall we?" Hermione asks, stifling a giggle. Draco nods, following her into the ancient building.

Professor Bates welcomes the pair with open arms, pulling them into a hug. As he pulls back, he stares at them with a knowing look. He raises an eyebrow, allowing his gaze to move from Hermione to Draco.

"Finally found our way to one another, I see," he smiles.

Both remain silent, staring at him with wide eyes.

"I always knew you two would end up together," the professor continues, gesturing for them to join him at his desk. "The tension between you was palpable. My wife and I had a bet about how long it would take for you to make things official. I'll have to floo her," he rambles, pouring three cups of tea with a smile. With the flick of his wand, the tea is prepared exactly to their liking, as if no time had passed since their last meeting.

"So, Ms. Granger, trying to cure lycanthropy are we?" the professor asks with a raised brow.

"Yes, sir," she smiles.

"Tell me what you've done so far."

With that, Hermione launches into an animated retelling of their research and attempts during the last full moon.

"The salt was perfectly equal. I measured multiple times."

"Yes, moonwort-infused for the middle, and black quicksilver and myrrh for the exterior."

"Yes, the Moonwort to strengthen the healing properties of the Myrrh."

"We predicted that by adding this Myrrh to the mix, the disparity between its potency and the aconites should allow for the human to heal at a faster rate than the lupus spirit is poisoned."

"Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor."

“The lupine rune, correct.”

Draco stays silent, quite content to allow Hermione to do all the talking. While he knows that this research is technically a collaboration, at its core, it is Hermione's. Draco doesn't mind in the slightest, allowing her to take charge, that is. He's just happy to be along for the ride.

He loves watching her brain at work – the way she waves her hands in the air around her, her brow furrowed. He loves the way she bites her lip when she thinks or purses her lips while she listens. He feels his mind wandering, the smell of strawberries and honey wafting toward him. He feels his jaw unclench and his temples soften.

“Right, Draco?” Hermione asks suddenly, causing Draco to straighten his posture and allow his eyes to focus once more.

“Yes,” he nods, though he hasn't a clue what he's agreeing to.

The professor stares at him expectantly, as if waiting for him to explain. Suddenly, Draco feels a polite knock on the exterior of his mind. He opens the door, allowing Hermione to peek her head in. *“Pay attention!” she scolds. “We're discussing the Zeus hypothesis.”*

“Aye Aye, Captain,” he salutes.

“Yes, we were wondering if perhaps a lightning storm might be the missing piece. Perhaps the electricity produced by lightning would strengthen the ritual?” Draco asks casually, as though he hadn't missed a beat.

The professor furrows his brow as he nods, evidently processing their suggestion. “That would be statistically almost impossible, for the storm to coincide with the full moon,” he adds.

“We thought that as well,” Hermione explains. “But perhaps we could capture lightning?” she asks hesitantly.

The professor nods. “I think you might be right.”

Hermione almost skips through the halls of Oxford, certain that they are on the right track. For the few days that followed their last attempt, she'd almost given up. Perhaps lycanthropy simply wasn't curable, she'd reasoned.

But.

She couldn't believe that.

Nor did she have the intention of giving up.

It had been a muggle textbook that had answered all of her questions. She's found over the years that sometimes the answer to magical problems is already-existing muggle solutions. Hermione hadn't been lying when she told Elizabeth that their unique perspectives were what makes them so powerful. Not many witches or wizards would think to consult a muggle science textbook for an alchemical problem, but Hermione had.

“The kite experiment is a scientific experiment in which a kite with a pointed, conductive wire attached to its apex is flown near thunder clouds to collect electricity from the air and conduct it

down the wet kite string to the ground. It was proposed and may have been conducted by Benjamin Franklin with the assistance of his son, William Franklin. The experiment's purpose was to uncover the unknown facts about the nature of lightning and electricity, and with further experiments on the ground, to demonstrate that lightning and electricity were the result of the same phenomenon."

Hermione had felt her heart skip a beat as she read the passage, immediately summoning a large stack of relevant books from the shelves. She'd known that the answer had to have been right in front of her, something so simple and seemingly inconsequential that it was blatantly obvious.

"A Leyden jar is an electrical component that stores a high-voltage electric charge (from an external source) between electrical conductors on the inside and outside of a glass jar. It typically consists of a glass jar with metal foil cemented to the inside and the outside surfaces, and a metal terminal projecting vertically through the jar lid to make contact with the inner foil."

Her face split into a grin as she instantly sent a Patronus for Draco to join her in the library. Her mind locked onto the page before her, and several moments passed before a very breathless blonde wizard appeared next to her.

"What is it?" he asked. "You said to come quick."

Without looking up from the book, Hermione replied, "listen to this," beginning to read the passage aloud.

"The Leyden jar was used to conduct many early experiments in electricity, and its discovery was of fundamental importance in the study of electrostatics. It was the first means of accumulating and preserving electric charge in large quantities that could be discharged at the experimenter's will, thus overcoming a significant limit to early research into electrical conduction. Leyden jars are still used in education to demonstrate the principles of electrostatics."

She looked at him with a glimmer in her eyes, one that Draco has come to learn signifies a breakthrough in the mind of the Brightest Witch of Her Age.

"I think the missing component is lightning. I know it sounds barmy, but I think if we can capture some in a Leyden jar, it could be used in the ritual."

Draco nodded, understanding. "What is electrostatics?" he asked.

"Electrostatics is the study of forces between charges, as described by Coulomb's Law," Hermione replied, citing the textbook.

Draco nodded once more, pretending to understand what on earth the witch was talking about. He trusts her. So much that he doesn't feel the need to confirm her every thought, a realisation that had shocked his very being all those years ago.

Coming to a screeching halt, Hermione grins at the wizard trailing happily behind her, raising her eyebrows playfully as she gestures to the building next to her. "Shall we?" she asks.

Draco grins. "We shall."

The coffee shop remains largely unchanged, a fact that causes Draco to feel both ecstatic and simultaneously uncomfortable. The same books still line the walls and plants hang in the windows. There are still eight tables squeezed into the room, all with mismatched chairs. The same red

espresso machine whirs to life and a barista steams milk. Jazz music floats through the room, and a very old fat cat lies sunbathing on the table nearest the window.

For a moment, Draco comes to a halt, his breath catching.

How is it that this café has remained untouched by the plague of time? How is it that so much has changed, yet not within the boundaries of these four walls?

It feels almost unfair that this café had been able to remain as it was. It felt like stepping into a pensieve – the exact time that Draco had wanted to preserve in a capsule existing now before him in living technicolour. He feels this deep sort of contentment, wishing that he had the power to simply cease the world around them so that they can exist for the rest of time in a moment when everything was in perfect equilibrium.

But, as he looks closer, he realised that just like everything else; the café wasn't the exact same at all.

Though the chairs were still mismatched, there was a green one that is now absent, a yellow one in its place. The plants had grown over the years, and some newer ones added to the mix. The eight tables have aged, words and symbols scratched into their wooden surfaces. The barista is unfamiliar, a young girl that hasn't the foggiest idea of Draco and Hermione's history with the café.

Two his left, Hermione experiences a very similar sensation to Draco, though in an entirely different fashion. She feels as if she is outside her body for a moment, watching the scene occur from above. She feels her chest constrict as reminders of her past come crashing toward her. The air feels thin and eager, but with something sad entwined in the particles of oxygen. The moment feels shocking and nostalgic all at once, like a slap across the face before being pulled into a hug.

She focuses on her heartbeat, allowing her entire being to focus on the flow of blood moving through the organ. But, as she does this, she realises she hasn't felt her heartbeat in some time now. While she's well aware that it has been beating, regardless of her awareness, she'd forgotten to notice.

She realises she's spent far too much time in her head as of late, and not nearly enough in her body. In fact, she's certain that she'd forgotten that she lives in a body at all. Sometimes Hermione feels like she's directing a play about her life, rather than living it. She frequently has these out-of-body experiences, ones that render her dazed for the remainder of the day.

But as Draco slips his digits between hers and guides her toward the counter, she feels herself spin into her body once more, suddenly entirely present within her body.

He's always had this sort of effect on her, and for that, she is forever thankful. She's certain that Draco's touch is a uniquely incomprehensible sort of magic, one that she would never dream of understanding.

She doesn't want to question it, to dissect it until it is rendered meaningless. She simply wants to relish in it.

"Two lattes, please," Draco smiles at the barista, sliding his muggle currency across the counter.

The barista counts his coins before looking up at him awkwardly. "Sorry sir, this isn't enough."

Draco looks back at Hermione, bewildered. He knows exactly how many muggle coins he needs for their coffees. Surely this barista is wrong?

“Oh, apologies,” Hermione smiles, sliding an extra bill into the pile.

Staring at the menu, Draco realises that his usual quantity of coins is indeed no longer sufficient.

“Inflation,” Hermione whispers as if this explains everything.

Though this change to the familiar is jarring for Draco, the situation is remedied the moment his mug is placed on the counter.

“Look,” he points excitedly.

There, in the mug, is a picture of a swan.

“Oh, that’s beautiful,” Hermione grins. “See, some new things are good,” she whispers.

Later that evening, Hermione makes a request that she’d been holding in for the entire day. “Shall we go to the park?” she asks.

Draco stares at her in silence for a moment, evidently surprised by her request.

“I don’t like my last memory of our spot. I’d like to replace it with a new one if that’s okay with you,” she whispers.

Draco nods in understanding, standing from the bed to clothe himself once more.

“Shall we stop at Tesco?” he smiles.

Paper bags filled with snacks and cheap wine, the pair apparate to their favourite spot: Grandpont Nature Park.

Much like the café, it appears as it always has. The ground beneath their feet seems to pulse with every step that they take, welcoming them back.

They go through the motions just as they did all those years ago. Hermione lays the knitted blanket on the ground, smoothing out the edges. Draco takes each individual item out of the paper bag and arranges them on the blanket.

It’s such a simple affair, inconsequential even, but Hermione grins as she watches him delicately place the crisps next to the rosé.

With the flick of his wand, the various meats, cheeses and crackers that they had selected arrange themselves on the wooden board they’d purchased. Draco’s brow furrows as he continues to move each section around until he nods, satisfied.

Hermione removes the lid from the rosé and takes a dramatic swig, laying back on the blanket. When they’d first started coming here, Draco had complained about the lack of glasses for the wine, calling it “barbaric.”

Now, however, he happily accepts the bottle with an outstretched hand and takes a long sip. His lips pucker as he pulls the bottle away. "God, that's awful," he chuckles.

"Shut up," Hermione scolds, stealing the bottle back.

The pair pick away at their food and talk about topics of no relevance for the better part of an hour, their inhibitions lowering with every sip they take.

It's as if Draco's wish has come true and the world has simply ceased to exist around them. Time pausing to allow for the pair to remain suspended between two moments.

Draco has been exceptionally happy as of late, but as Hermione tosses her head back in laughter, a snort emerging from her nose, he's certain that he's never felt unadulterated joy to such an extent. His heart sings, and every inch of his skin tingles, begging for him to reach out and touch the witch next to him.

Eventually, he does just that. He tugs on her jumper, pulling her towards him. She presses the tip of her nose to his and grins, neither feeling any need to speak. They stare into each other's eyes, their cheeks flushed from both the wine and the evening itself.

Draco delicately extends his hand, tucking a loose curl behind her ear, allowing his thumb to linger momentarily on her cheek. Her eyes bore into him, the warm honey swirling with desire.

"Can we?" she whispers.

He replies with a devilish grin, crashing his lips into hers with a fervent need. In one swift motion, he places her gently on the blanket beneath them before crawling his way toward her. He nips and pecks at her neck, causing her to tilt her head back with a smile. He slowly pulls her jumper over her head, releasing what can only be described as a sigh of longing.

"Merlin, these tits," he mumbles. He grabs both of her tits in his smooth hands as he nips at her neck, whispering incoherent phrases that become muffled against her skin. Hermione's head is tossed back, her curls falling loosely behind her. Her cheeks are flushed, her mind hazy with anticipation.

He continues to pepper kisses down her neck, eventually working his way down her chest. He takes her nipple into his mouth and sucks, pulling at it with his teeth. She squirms, breathy sighs leaving her lips.

She reaches her arm downward, attempting to unfasten his belt, eager to move things along.

"Granger, you're a witch, remember?" he whispers with a smirk.

She nods, pointing her finger toward his trousers and promptly vanishing them entirely. She begins to sit up, pushing him with her.

"What?" he asks, confused. She only smirks in reply and positions herself between his legs, casting a privacy charm as she does.

A look of realisation spreads across Draco's face, the anticipation of what's about to occur sending a jolt of arousal toward his already throbbing rigidness.

Hermione lowers herself onto her knees, spreading his thighs ever so slightly. She points her finger at his boxers, and they quickly vanish as well. Her eyes grow wide at the sight of him, a devilish smile making its way onto her face as she feels herself growing more and more aroused.

She eagerly licks at his length, taking the tip into her mouth and teasing him as she sucks and releases it with a *pop*. “Fuck, Granger,” she hears, Draco’s hand coming down to tangle itself in her curls.

She sits a little taller, quickly taking his length into her mouth and beginning to suck and lick at it in a frenzied need. She allows her mind to go almost blank, her lust taking over for the time being.

Draco tilts his head back and releases a groan, his mind becoming hazy as her tongue and lips work over his length, sucking, licking, and filling her mouth with him.

He adores the way that the witch is methodological about it, cataloguing each and every one of his reactions to determine what he enjoys. He moans as she lowers her mouth further than she had been, reaching almost the base of his length. He can feel the tip come into contact with the back of her mouth as he releases a pleasure-filled groan.

She pulls her lips off of him with one last pop, tossing her hair back and standing before him. Her tits are now at his eye level, and Draco finds himself pulling her toward him, quite enjoying the feeling of her nipple between his teeth.

She pushes him back onto the blanket, scolding him playfully. She crawls onto his lap, licking and pecking at his chest. She traces her tongue along his *sextumsemptra* scars, placing a delicate kiss where they come to an end. She allows her cunt to drag slowly over his length, her eyes rolling back as his tip rubs against her clit. “Fuck,” she mumbles, nipping at his neck.

She continues to tease him a little longer, both because of the absolute euphoria the motion is causing her to feel, and the reactions she’s evoking from Draco.

“Fucking hell, Granger,” he groans, keeping his hands firmly grasped on her arse.

She raises herself slowly, allowing his cock to rise upward before she quickly sinks down onto him, taking him inch by inch into her already wet cunt. His hands snap to her hips, his mouth falling open, and she rocks against him.

She places her hands on his chest, allowing her nails to dig into his skin ever so slightly. She leans forward, circling her hips in a frenzied rhythm. Feeling his length drag inside her sends shivers across her skin. The look in his eyes as he watches her take him causes her walls to flutter.

As she leans back and slows her pace, he brings his thumb toward her clit, circling and flicking at it with a groan. In response, she quickens her pace once more, tossing her head back with her mouth ajar. “Fuck, fuck, yes Draco,” she whines.

As she lowers her chest to his, pulling at his lower lip with her teeth, his hands begin to guide her hips. He snaps his hips against her, and she gasps into his mouth, unable to match the new pace he is hellbent on setting. Her walls tighten around his cock as he fucks her. She nips at his neck, whispering breathy sighs into his ear.

Draco keeps his quickened rhythmic pace, grinning to himself as he feels her walls clench. “Such a good girl, Hermione,” he whispers, his words muffled as he groans at the sensation.

A shaky exhale escapes her lips as she digs her nails into his shoulders, her chest beginning to heave as she swears under her breath, a symphony of *“Fuck, yes, Draco, yes, right there, yes, fuck.”*

Draco smiles as she begins to writhe on top of him, releasing a high-pitched shriek of pleasure. Draco continues to fuck her as she rides him through her first climax. “So - fucking - hot,” he groans in between each thrust.

The second he feels her come undone, he picks her up with ease and lays her down on the bed next to him, slipping her onto her stomach. She writhes and whimpers at the loss of sensation, but he quickly twists her knee up to her chest as he lifts her arse, pulling her back onto his cock once more.

He holds onto her hips and continues to snap her arse back against his cock, driving himself deeper into her cunt as he feels his length twitch. He brings his index and middle fingers toward her clit, moving them in a rhythmic circular motion, relishing in the way she squirms, breathy moans leaving her swollen lips.

Any kind of restraint that Draco had possessed quickly disappears, the unmistakable feeling of lust overriding all his other senses. With a groan, he feels himself come undone. Hermione’s cunt twitches against his length as she releases a shriek.

They stay in this position for a moment, both panting as they attempt to come down from the lust-fuelled high they’d just achieved. Draco slowly removes himself from her, gently lowering her onto the blanket once more.

“I love you, Draco Malfoy,” she smiles.

“And I love you, Hermione Granger,” he echoes.

The pair lay back and stare at the stars above them, their chests rising and falling in unison. They allow their pinkies to find each other between them, both quite content with their evening thus far.

They feel this inexplicable sort of comfort when in the presence of the other, the intimacy they share acting as a blanket, shielding them from the outside world.

Hermione wishes she could bottle this moment and drink it until the end of time. It would be a beautiful existence, to drown in the feeling of *love*. But she knows better. She knows that this moment is beautiful for all that it is, but even more so because it is fleeting.

The inevitability of its closure is what makes this moment so beautiful. She could cling to it for dear life, should she wish, but she knows it will never be the same as it was her first time experiencing it.

And so, as Hermione buries her face into the chest of the man she loves she realises that this moment is beautiful because they will never experience it again, it’s beautiful because it will exist as a memory and nothing more – a wisp of love that floats between them.

And Hermione has come to peace with that, found comfort in it even. She sees them in the night sky, their memories twinkling as if in greeting, each flicker a reminder of all that they have experienced, and all the moments they have yet to encounter.

Their love is made of stars, and both Hermione and Draco are quite content to exist in starlight for the rest of their days.

Raison d'être

Chapter Notes

We are nearing the end of this fic! A huge thank you to all of you who have been following along since the beginning.

I hope you all enjoy this fluffy chapter!

Beta love ♡ to whits_end and likelyunfinished !! This fic would not be what it is today without this lovely team.

Ps. the definition at the beginning of this chapter is inspired by likelyunfinished's current WIP "Goodnight, You" (which is fantastic, and you should start reading it if you haven't already.)

rai·son d'ê·tre

/ˌrāzôn ˈdetrə/

noun

the most important reason or purpose for someone or something's existence.

If you had asked Hermione Granger a few short years ago whether or not she'd ever be close acquaintances with Pansy Parkinson, her reply would have been without a doubt *no* . However, as with most things in life, circumstances ebb and flow, the current carrying us along until we arrive where we're meant to be. And, as fate would have it, Hermione Granger is meant to be perhaps even more than acquaintances with the sole heir to the Parkinson estate.

“Thank you for meeting with me Pansy,” Hermione smiles carefully.

She focuses on steadying her breathing as she realises that she's suddenly far too conscious of every single inch of her body: every unplucked hair or dry patch of skin. It's hard not to when Pansy sits across from her, shiny black hair cut into a perfectly coiffed bob, nails expertly manicured into pointed black talons. Her lips are painted a colour that falls between red and black, a shade Hermione is convinced was made for Pansy to wear and no one else. The black robes the witch adorns are tasteful yet enticing, a stark contrast to the drab brown number Hermione had worn to teach earlier that day. Her robes had seemed like a perfectly acceptable option this morning, but now as she sits across from a witch who is her diametric opposite in every way, she can't help but wish she'd opted for something a little less, *scholarly* .

“Of course Granger, you know me. I love any excuse to plan a *soirée* ,” the witch smiles back, her left eyebrow raised ever so slightly.

Hermione nods, for she is well aware of this fact. It had been Pansy who had become the unofficial social chair during their eighth year, planning a party for every holiday and celebration one could think of. Even Hermione had to admit the evenings were always a raging success. She herself had attended them frequently with Theodore.

“Yes, well, I knew you’d be the best for the job,” Hermione replies, trying her hand at flattery. “Besides, you know all Draco’s friends, so it will be much easier for you to send out invitations than if I were to.”

“Yes, and I have all the time in the world to plan it. I’m sure you’re quite the busy witch,” Pansy smiles, sipping her tea with the practiced elegance only a pureblood witch could muster.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Hermione nods, unsure how to reply to such a remark.

“No matter, I have it under control Granger, all you have to do is arrive via portkey the evening of his birthday, and I’ll take care of everything else,” the witch grins. Hermione notices that there’s a playful sort of look in her eye, thoughts passing through her irises in a similar fashion to her own.

“Thank you, Pansy,” Hermione smiles. She’d been fretting about Draco’s birthday celebration for weeks now. She wanted to plan something that would be meaningful to him, of course, but also did not possess the years of etiquette training required to pull off such a feat without driving herself absolutely barmy.

She knows very well that the wizard probably would be more than happy with a simple dinner and a kiss on the forehead, but she is hell-bent on making sure his 27th birthday is his best yet.

Hermione has always loved celebrating her loved ones' birthdays, finding it the perfect occasion to remind those she holds dear of their importance and value in life. But, with Draco, there is perhaps an added element of determination, for he has always made sure that she feels appreciated on *her* day.

Though she had yet to confront him about the whole cupcake fiasco and his half-truth, she plans to do just that. She knows he likely evaded the conversation for the sake of self-preservation all those months ago, but she’s certain that the pair has moved far past being awkward around one another’s affections.

So, while Pansy has been tasked with planning the party of a generation, Hermione has one more meeting that day. She stands and smooths her robes and steps into the bustling street of Hogsmeade. The door of The Foggy Bean Café swings shut behind her, the bell over the door chiming in farewell.

She meanders through the small village, smiling at those she passes. It makes her happy to see all the businesses and inhabitants thriving. Over the years, Hogsmeade had turned into a much larger Wizarding settlement than it had once been. Houses seemed to spring up every day, many families opting to raise their children near the school.

Secretly, Hermione has always wondered if perhaps she might own a home within the village. It would be the perfect location, she reasoned. It’s close to the school, meaning she could live at home and still teach. It’s close to Remus, Sirius and Cassie as well. There’s a wizarding primary school that had recently been built for her children.

Children.

Sometimes, Hermione's mind wanders towards the possibility of children.

For years, she'd tried to convince herself that she was more than happy to be an aunt and godmother and nothing more. And truthfully, perhaps at one point, she had been perfectly content with this. But, as of late, she'd been struggling to convince herself of this more and more.

She's certainly in no rush, but over the past few weeks, she's realised that she's reached a point in her life where she is perfectly content. Ever since she'd graduated Hogwarts after the war, she'd been barrelling forward—chasing goal after goal, milestone after milestone.

But, now she is reminded of the words that were spoken to her all those years ago: *"You seem to think that a peak is merely a stop on your journey, rather than the location you're meant to remain. You've earned your place at the top Granger. Now all that's expected of you is to enjoy it."*

She indisputably feels like she's at her peak, truly and honestly this time. She's been enjoying herself more than she ever thought she would, in fact. But something about the wizard who had spoken those words to her makes her crave something *more*.

Now, Hermione doesn't want to get ahead of herself by any means, but she would like to marry the prat someday. *Someday soon.*

She knows that everything happens for a reason and that their years apart brought them to where they are today. But she still sometimes feels as if those years of her life had been wasted. She'd been a ghost of herself and nothing more, floating through her existence. It had been noticeable too, as she'd noticed a steady rotation of wellness checks from her friends. Luna would drop by with a new herbal blend for her to try, or Ginny would stop by and insist she join her on a shopping trip. Neville would floo her and ask for her help tending his garden, or Harry would ask for her to come to the shops with him and the children. It wasn't that she'd been depressed per se, but rather without purpose.

Though she would never admit this to anyone, as it feels slightly anti-feminist to say, Draco brings a certain amount of purpose into her life. She certainly isn't reliant on him, but she can't help but admit that he makes her life much more enjoyable. If anything, she would say that Draco is the physical embodiment of *joie de vivre*. Where there were once muted tones and greys, there are now technicolour shades of every colour the eye can decipher. Where there was one monotony and obligation, there is now excitement and desire.

So yes, Hermione Granger wants to marry the prat, but she's vowed to remain patient.

As much as possible.

Well, she may be planning to meddle. Just a bit.

She pushes the oak door of Hogsmeade's newest business open, the bronze sign overhead reading: *The Asphodel Apothecary.*

"Hey, Mione!" Theo exclaims, hopping off of the counter and launching himself into a hug.

"Hi Theo," Hermione smiles, her voice muffled by the wizard's chest.

"So what do you think of Drakey's newest investment?" Theo grins, gesturing around the space like a muggle game show host.

“It’s beautiful,” Hermione admits, smiling as she notices the various plants hanging about the space.

“Yes, the plants are gorgeous, aren’t they?” Theo smirks. “You know who else is gorgeous?”

“Who?” Hermione asks.

“The strapping lad who brought them by,” Theo replies, fanning his face.

“Neville?” Hermione exclaims.

“He’s definitely gotten absolutely *fuckable* over the years, hasn’t he?” Theo smiles, jumping back up onto the counter and swinging his feet back and forth.

“Yes, that is the general consensus amongst witches,” Hermione laughs.

“Is he seeing anyone?” Theo asks, suddenly very serious.

“Well, no, but he has been pining after Luna for some time now,” Hermione admits. “I’m also not sure if he’s... you know... into wizards.”

“Oh, he absolutely is,” Theo grins devilishly. “My gaydar is never wrong.”

“Well, he’s attending Draco’s birthday so...” Hermione smiles.

“Perfect,” Theo smiles, clapping his hands together. “Now, for what reason did you come wandering into my shop, seeking my sage advice?”

“Not advice, really...” Hermione begins, suddenly feeling rather awkward. She approaches a shelf and starts to aimlessly inspect the jars that it holds.

“Spit it out, Mione,” Theo chants.

Hermione whips toward him, adamant to do just that. “DoyouthinkDracowantstomarryme?” she asks quickly, her words blurring together.

Theo bursts into laughter, toppling off of the counter into a ball on the floor clutching his sides. “Does... Drakey... want... to marry... Hermione Granger... oh... that’s a good one,” he howls.

“Well?” Hermione asks, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Mione, aren’t you supposed to be bright?” Theo asks, sitting up against the marble of the counter. She remains silent, lips pursed and eyebrow raised.

“Yes, *Hermione*, Draco’s wanted to marry you for some time now,” Theo smiles.

Hermione feels her chest deflate and her shoulders relax.

“Well, that’s good then,” she replies, her voice quiet.

“Why, do you want to marry the Dragon, Granger?” Theo teases, approaching her and toying with one of her curls. “Spend a life being hoarded in his lair?”

“Something like that,” she giggles. “Tell him to get a move on, will you?”

Theo bursts into a full belly laugh once more, tears forming in the corners of his eyes. “Yeah, okay Granger, I’ll get right on that. You and I both know Drakey *loves* people telling him what to do and meddling with his personal affairs.”

Hermione’s pleading stare must have been quite effective, however, for Theo smiles. “Patience, Granger.”

And with that, Hermione sets out into the bustling street once more with one more stop on her agenda for the day.

Theo watches as the witch walks away, releasing a long sigh.

“That was a close one,” he mutters under his breath. Because no sooner has the witch disappeared from sight does the door swing open once more, a very pale blonde wizard filling the frame.

“Theodore,” he nods, entering the space with purpose.

“Oh hey Drakey, fancy seeing you here,” Theo grins.

“Enough with that nickname, Theodore,” Draco frowns. He’s always loathed the name that Theo had given him as children, especially now that he’s a grown wizard.

“Whatever you say Drakey,” Theo replies.

“Okay *Teddy*,” Draco retorts. “Plants look good,” he observes.

“Yeah, *Professor Longbottom* just swung by this morning,” Theo grins devilishly.

Draco nods absentmindedly.

“Do you happen to know if he enjoys the sexual company of wizards?” Theo continues.

Draco turns to face him with a blank sort of expression. “Haven’t a clue, Teddy.”

“Well, if he doesn’t already he will in a week's time,” Theo grins.

“Why a week?” Draco asks.

“No reason.”

Draco nods, decidedly not wanting to push the matter further. “I’ve come for your assistance, actually,” he adds.

“Oh?”

“Yes, I’d like for you to accompany me to Gringotts,” Draco replies, face stoic.

“Whatever for?” Theo asks, eyes wide.

“I would like to pick out a ring for Granger.”

The day of Draco's 27th birthday arrives without too much fuss. Hermione does her best to keep things casual as to not let her excitement for the evening show. She knows Draco is able to read her like a book, her every emotion and thought essentially transparent. It's mentally taxing to keep her occlumency shields up in his presence, especially because they have the same prep period that day.

"Professor Granger," Draco greets her, approaching her with a bow.

"Professor Malfoy," she smiles, attempting her best curtsy.

"I have a request for you, oh fair maiden," he continues, taking her hand in his and placing a delicate kiss on her skin.

"And what might that be?" she asks.

The wizard leans closer, bringing his mouth next to her ear. His scent surrounds her, his proximity rendering Hermione weak in the knees.

"I'd like to request a mid-day shag m'lady," he smirks, each individual morpheme rolling off of his tongue in an absolutely delectable manner.

"Oh would you?" she asks, attempting to remain resilient.

"Mhm," he replies, kissing her earlobe.

"I suppose that could be arranged. With whom are you hoping to engage in such an activity?" she asks.

"Hermione Granger, perhaps you know her," he whispers, trailing his hand across her jaw and peppering kisses on her neck.

"Oh yes, I believe she may be interested," Hermione replies, her tone breathy.

"Oh is she?" Draco smirks, his breath growing hot against her skin.

With that, the pair take off into the hall, casting a disillusion charm over their heads. They keep to the stone walls, twisting through Hogwarts' halls until they arrive at Hermione's personal quarters.

"After you m'lady," Draco whispers.

The minute the door swings shut, Hermione casts enough wards and charms to ward off a number of dark forces and launches herself into Draco's arms.

Many of the students in the Great Hall notice that two of their Professors are absent from dinner that evening, their empty chairs sticking out like a sore thumb. Cassie smirks to herself as she listens to her fellow seventh-years gossip and hypothesises where they might be.

"It's Professor Malfoy's birthday, surely they're celebrating," Celia smirks.

"What if they're taking a portkey to Paris as we speak?" Joy gushes, fanning herself with her serviette.

“Or having a romp in the dungeons,” Daniel laughs.

Joy whacks the wizard over the back of his head. “Professor Malfoy is a gentleman,” she explains. “He’s not going to want to shag his girlfriend in the dungeons like a schoolboy.”

“Gentleman or not, every wizard wants a shag on their birthday,” Daniel replies, his friends nodding in agreement.

“Cass?” Celia asks.

“Mhm.”

“Can you please put us out of our misery?” the witch begs.

“They’re out to dinner as we speak, then there’s a party at the Parkinson Manor later. Yes, I will be attending and no, you can’t come,” Cassie replies, rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand. She’d been training every day for the final task, following a well-established schedule.

Mondays - Runes & Alchemy with Hermione

Tuesday - Occulemency and Legilimency with Professor Malfoy

Wednesday - Defensive techniques and offensive spells with her father

Thursday - Charms and healing with Hermione

Friday - Transfiguration and duelling with her dad

She’s ever so thankful for the overwhelming support at her disposal, and more than proud of her success thus far in the tournament, but she is also *exhausted*. Her brain feels like it’s bursting at the seams with information, and her body aches in a way she’s never felt before.

Truth be told, she wants the tournament to simply be *done* just as much as she wants to win at this point.

All those present pouts ever so slightly, no doubt wishing they had received an invitation to the celebration.

“Celia, Joy, want to help me get ready?” she asks, standing from the table.

“Ou yes!” they exclaim, quickly standing and following after her.

Daniel looks longingly at the three witches as they part, earning him a few well-meaning snickers from his friends. “Stand *up*, Evans,” they tease, ruffling the boy’s hair.

“What is the dress code, Granger?” Draco asks, fastening his tie with a flick of his wand.

“Just dress nice,” Hermione smiles.

“Do I need a vest?” he asks, summoning three options from his wardrobe.

“Erm, no?” Hermione replies hesitantly.

Draco grimaces, no doubt biting his tongue as he inhales. “Very well,” he smiles a beat later.

Once Draco is satisfied with his ensemble, the pair walk to Hogsmeade, their departure perfectly timed with the students’ dinner.

“Ready?” Hermione asks, feeding her hand into his.

“Take me wherever you please, Granger,” Draco smiles.

With that, the pair spin into nothingness, as if they’d never been there at all.

A short moment later, they appear in Diagon Alley, a soft breeze causing Hermione’s curls to float around her head like a halo.

For a moment, Draco considers asking Hermione to blow off whatever plans she has and to snog him senselessly right here in the middle of the Alley. But the excited expression on the witch’s face eradicates this thought completely. Perhaps later, he reasons with himself.

She guides him to a secluded area of the alley, coming to an abrupt halt in front of a restaurant that Draco is all too familiar with.

Brasserie Lyon is a famed establishment within the wizarding world with only three locations: London, Lyon, and New York. Their curated French cuisine has been famous for generations, especially amongst pureblood families. As a matter of fact, it was at this very establishment that Draco’s father had proposed to his mother, though he doubts Hermione is aware of this.

“Theodore recommended this place,” Hermione smiles. “Have you eaten here before?”

He nods, wrapping his arm around her waist and guiding her inside.

The dinner passes in a haze of wine (aged since the Norman Conquest), Boeuf Bourguignon, Bouillabaisse, Tarte Tatin, Escargot and Chocolate soufflé. By the time the pair make their way back outside, they are practically delirious, both the wine and cuisine rendering them exceptionally giddy.

“Can I ravish you now Granger?” Draco asks with a smirk.

Hermione wraps her arms around his neck and pulls his face toward hers, her mind becoming blank. She feels like she’s floating – as if her body has left the ground beneath her feet.

It isn’t until they land and turn to face a crowd of over fifty people that Hermione recalls the portkey that had been safely tied around her neck: an emerald necklace.

Draco quickly removes his hand from her chest and grins, realising that perhaps every family member and friend is present before him.

“Drakey!” Theo exclaims, charging towards him. “You have an erection brother, you may want to deal with that,” he whispers.

Draco’s cheeks grow flushed as he quickly casts a disillusion charm at his groin before turning to continue greeting all those present.

Hermione happily weaves through the crowd in search of a raven-haired pureblood witch.

“Quite the entrance Granger,” Pansy smirks, raising a glass of champagne in her direction.

“Yes, well, we got a tad bit carried away,” Hermione giggles.

“French cuisine is an aphrodisiac. I can’t blame you,” the witch smiles.

Draco feels positively overwhelmed and simultaneously elated by the evening. Sometimes it’s hard to remember how many loved ones we have in our lives until they’re all present in one room. Draco has always fancied himself a lone wolf of sorts, but as he glances around the Parkinson ballroom, he realises that this is not the case whatsoever.

His childhood friends, his coworkers and family members near and far all seem to have made his birthday their priority for the evening, and if Draco is honest with himself, he finds this quite touching.

Daphne and Blaise envelop him into a hug, peppering sloppy kisses across his face. Theo squeezes his arse, and Pansy sends him a well-aimed smirk. Adrian Pucey offers him a flute of champagne, and Millicent flips him the bird. Merlin, he’s missed the snakes.

Neville smiles at him from across the room, a very eager Theo making a beeline in his direction. Harry and Ginny stand conversing animatedly with his parents, a sight he never thought he’d see. He watches as Luna breezes across the room toward Pansy, and braces for impact, but is surprised when the raven-haired witch offers a smile to the Ravenclaw instead.

His heart swells at the presence of all those he holds dear, the unmistakable feeling of gratitude coursing through his veins. He would have been happy with a nice dinner and romp with Granger, but this.

This.

This almost brings tears to his eyes.

There was a time in Draco’s life when he’d been convinced that his life would result in nothing at all. He’d pictured his future, the setting always a cell in Azkaban or nothing at all.

But, over the years, something had shifted.

He knows he can’t give her all the credit, but he’s positive that a curly-haired witch is at the centre of this shift. Draco knows he wouldn’t be the man he is today without Hermione Granger – his *raison d’être*.

Truthfully, there was a point when Draco hadn’t believed in *love* at all. That heart-wrenching, all-encompassing love that everyone seeks whether or not they admit it. He’d certainly witnessed what people may consider to be love, but he supposed it was only a small-minded variant of it, if anything at all.

But Hermione Granger had Draco Malfoy wholly convinced regarding the existence of this life-altering love he’d thought to be a myth. The feelings he has for his witch differ from those that he’d anticipated – perhaps less dramatic than he’d once thought. Because Draco has discovered that love is really quite simple after all, it’s about making someone else’s existence easier in any way you

can. It's about memorising their favourite food, and the songs that make them dance, the memories they hold dear, and the way the changing of the seasons affects them.

So, yes, the witch that catches his eye from across the room is his *raison d'être*, because she has convinced Draco that life has far more meaning than simply existing. She makes his heart constrict in the most delightful way, a pain so delectable that he believes that he'd be content if it was the last thing he ever felt.

But perhaps most importantly, Hermione has made him realise that, as it may be, our purpose in life is to love and nothing else.

"Happy Birthday to you,

Happy Birthday to you,

Happy Birthday dear DRAAACCOOOOOOOOOO,

Happy Birthday to you."

And so, as Draco blows out the candles on the larger-than-life cake Pansy had ordered, he smiles to himself, because on top of the three-tiered baked good, is a single pink cupcake.

Memorias Malum

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the long-awaited third and final task! This was a tough chapter to write, but I hope you enjoy it nonetheless.

Thank you to all of you who have stuck around so far, this fic is such a labour of love and I am so thankful for every comment and kudos. 4 chapters and 2 epilogues to go!

As always, I have so much love for my alpha/beta team: whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The task had seemed simple at first.

Each of the champions would be given a vial of a potion – one that would cause them to experience numerous challenges in their mind. Each person’s mind would then be projected onto the screen behind them. This allowed all those present and watching from their homes to see the challenges they were encountering. The potion works in such a way that the champions are unaware that the experiences they are having are not real. To each of them, the challenges feel as real as their day-to-day lives.

Intrigued, Draco attempted to decipher the ingredients and brewing techniques that no doubt had been used in the potion. It was when he saw the potion, however, that worry crept in.

Because the potion looked almost exactly like *Felix memorias* – the telltale silver shimmer was identical. However, something was off.

The flecks of gold that catch the light within his potion had been notably absent.

Draco Malfoy considers himself to be a fairly level-headed individual. He’d faced many things in his life—most notably a psychopathic tyrant living in his home—but these experiences somehow seem paltry compared to the horror he experiences as the Uagadou champion downs the vial of shiny silver potion.

He feels his breath catch, and his chest constrict.

No, surely not.

It can't be.

It makes no sense whatsoever.

It had been the noble thing to do really — selling the rights to *Felix memorias* to the Ministry of Magic, that is. Well, noble in that Draco wanted the potion to be mass-produced and widely accessible. It had also been an excellent economic decision; the rights earning him and his

apothecary several thousand galleons. However, much to his displeasure, the potion that had helped him heal through his darkest times never reached mass production. His contact at the ministry had told him a well-rehearsed tale of ethics, funding, and mind healer recommendations.

The story had left an uneasy feeling in Draco's gut, his subconscious practically begging him to consider the possibility that the Ministry had had nefarious intentions. Draco had disregarded his intuitions entirely, instead opting to continue to produce the potion on a much smaller scale within his apothecary. He was the only potioneer with the rights to do so outside of the Ministry—a clause in his contract that he had insisted upon. He had taken this responsibility in stride, passing the production off to Theo after taking on the Potion's Master position at Hogwarts. They had a steady stream of clientele who purchased the brew on a regular basis, many of them dealing with the effects of what Draco had learned to be called PTSD—post-traumatic stress disorder, according to Granger.

All of them continuously thanked him for the brew, telling him tales of just how impactful it had been on their lives. This uneasiness he'd felt never really went away for this reason. It bothered him that more people weren't able to access the brew.

Years after the transfer of production rights had been passed off to the Ministry, however, this feeling of wrongness arises again.

Because something about the potion that is no doubt spreading through Mukisa's veins had looked familiar, yet *different*.

"Granger?" he whispers to the witch next to him.

"Mhm?" she replies, not taking her eyes off of her goddaughter.

"I need one of those vials," he whispers, pointing toward the seven remaining vials.

"Why?" she asks, her honey-brown eyes finding his.

"Just trust me," he replies.

With the flick of her finger, one vial comes whizzing toward Draco's outstretched hand. He takes off at a brisk pace toward the dungeons. He thanks whichever higher power chooses to listen that the third and final task is taking place in the Great Hall, his supplies much more accessible than if they were at another obscure location.

He mutters under his breath as he pours the vial into his pewter cauldron, beginning the arduous process of breaking the brew apart to analyse its components.

Luckily, Draco is quite adept at such a task, and enters a trance of sorts, flicking his wand and dissecting the potion with ease.

In the end, it's just as he'd suspected.

This potion at its core is *Felix memorias*. Everything is the same. The Jobberknoll feathers, the Lavender and Valerian root. It had been stirred thirteen times counterclockwise under the moonlight. *But*, it had been tampered with.

In the final stage of the brewing process, an ingredient had been added.

The essence of dementor.

Draco had heard of this ingredient making its way through the black market, though he hadn't had the foggiest sort of idea what it could be used for.

Now, however, he's certain that his potion – the potion that had been designed to help people experience their happiest memories – had essentially been reversed.

A shiver makes its way down his spine as he rushes to reassemble the potion, the molecules fusing together once more.

“Expecto patronum,” he speaks quickly, his Hebridean Black appearing before him. “Theo, I need you to meet me at the school as quickly as you can.”

With that, the dragon disappears into the night, and Draco hastens upstairs.

Hermione watches in horror as the first three champions attempt to fight off incomprehensible horrors. She quickly realised that it is only when the champion's mind begins to shut down in fear that they are awoken from the potion. The Uagadou champion returns to his body after watching a girl turn into a ghost before his very eyes. The Castelobruxo champion awakens after watching two people who bear a familial resemblance struck down by a flash of green light. The Beauxbatons champion awakens as a Basilisk opens its mouth to swallow him entirely.

Professor Granger looks around in a frenzy, her heart rate slowing ever so slightly when she spots a familiar head of blonde hair. He approaches her, eyes hazy. She can always tell when Draco is deep in thought, but as he runs his hand through his hair and bites his lip, she's certain there's more to it.

He stands silently next to her, giving her hand a light squeeze.

She opens her mouth to speak, but just before the first word escapes her lips, she feels a cooling sensation spread throughout her mind.

It's my potion.

What?

Felix Memorias, but... it's been tampered with.

How?

Essence of dementor was added in the final stage of the brewing process.

So, rather than happy memories...

Horrible memories, their worst fears, appearing before their very eyes.

Memorias malum.

Indeed.

Is it safe?

Have the champions been able to escape?

Sort of... I believe it's when their brain begins to shut down in fear.

How will they pick a winner?

I believe it's whoever can overcome their fears.

Before their conversation can continue, Draco feels a presence next to him.

“Hey Drakey,” Theo whispers. “How can I assist?”

“You see those potions?” Draco replies, tilting his head towards the vials.

“Are those?” Theo begins to ask. “No....”

“We need to brew an antidote for felix memorias,” Draco whispers. “But, we need to account for the fact that there was essence of dementor added in the final stage of brewing.”

Theo's eyes go wide as he glances in Hermione's direction. Despite taking eight NEWT examinations with the witch, he'd never seen her more anxious than at this very moment. Her hair has become frazzled over the past hour, and her nails are now bitten to the point of bleeding.

Draco places a reassuring hand on the small of her back.

She'll be okay.

She nods, though he can tell she isn't reassured in the slightest.

With that, the two wizards head toward the dungeons. However, just as they are about to descend the stone staircase, Draco comes to a halt. “Room of Requirement?” he asks.

Theo nods.

The room appears as it has been for Draco and Hermione's lycanthropy research, though with some notable differences. Vines or various plants weave towards the ceiling, sunlight peaking through the window. Draco stares for a moment at the sight – a stark contrast to the night sky he knows is present outside of the castle.

The sunlight illuminates his face, causing his silver irises to appear almost iridescent. He can feel the heat of the beam of light warm his skin.

“So, essence of dementor?” Theo asks, breaking the silence.

Draco nods, summoning various cauldrons and supplies toward the workbench. “I believe the champions will experience their worst fears.”

“I know you're well aware of this, but there are little to no studies that have been conducted regarding the use of essence of dementor.”

Draco nods once more, his brow furrowed. “I have an idea.”

“Oh?”

“Granger and I, we’ve been experimenting with using lightning as an ingredient,” he begins, pacing around the room. “Rather than focusing on the essence itself—which, as you said, there is very little knowledge about—I thought we might focus on the being itself.”

“Potion ingredients are usually more tangible objects. How are you using lightning?” Theo asks.

“Well, we plan to gather it with a muggle contraption called a Leyden jar,” Draco begins. He begins to pour ingredients into his cauldron in a seemingly random fashion, though Theo knows that this combination is anything but ad hoc.

“Anyway, I’m wondering if we might be able to capture a patronus charm somehow...” Draco continues, sweat beginning to gather along his brow as the flame beneath the cauldron grows.

“To use in a potion?” Theo asks in disbelief.

“I can neutralise felix memorias, of course. We know so little about the properties of this essence, of how it reacts in tandem with the other elements in the brew. We don’t know its ideal brewing temperature, nor which dosage is considered lethal. All we know is that the patronus charm is the only combatant against the creatures.”

“Expecto patronum,” Theo smiles, stifling a laugh as his Pterodactyl flies about the room. “How can we capture him? He doesn’t look like something that wishes to be contained.”

Draco stares at the apparition, the way its wings expand and move as it rides a current invisible to the human eye. It looks free.

Without uttering a word, he casts his Dragon watching as the Hebridean Black soars through the room. It’s dark rough scales, bat-like wings, and a tail tipped with an arrow-shaped spike glimmering in the sunlight.

After his patronus had first emerged from his wand all those years ago, he’d researched the being.

The Hebridean Black was a dragon species native to the Hebrides islands of Scotland. The Hebridean Black was more aggressive than the other dragon native to the British Isles, the Common Welsh Green, and thus required a territory of as much as one hundred square miles each. It is known to be fiercely protective towards that which it holds dear.

But, of course, the Dragon does not look like something that wishes to be contained either. Wizards still seem to not have learnt their lesson, for dragons are not meant to be kept nor tamed. Dragons are free beings who are made of just as much magic as they are earth. They are believed to have been created by the gods themselves, their fury embedded in their very bones.

Draco’s mind continues to wander as he watches Theo chase his patronus with a glass jar, his plan now seeming slightly less... well thought out.

That is, until a familiar creature begins to swirl around his head.

“Hello,” Draco smiles, the otter coming to hover in front of him.

“Otters are a symbol of good luck, playfulness, and adaptability,” he hears behind him.

Draco watches in awe as Hermione summons the jar from Theo’s grasp. She makes a beckoning sort of noise with her tongue, one that might be used with a cat. Her otter zips towards her in glee,

only pausing for a moment to torment the dragon, who had gone eerily still at its arrival.

“He wants to help,” she explains. “Under each forearm are baggy pockets of loose skin. The sea otter uses these pockets to store the food it has gathered. It also stores favourite rocks that it uses for cracking open molluscs and clams.”

Draco nods, unsure why Hermione is choosing now to lecture him about the species. However, the otter quickly removes what Draco can only assume is his favourite rock from under his arm, and places it without complaint into the jar.

Hermione screws the lid on tightly and passes it to Theo once more. “Good idea, by the way,” she smiles.

Without another word, she turns and leaves.

“Some witch you’ve got there Drakey,” Theo smiles.

Draco nods, once again finding himself in the unique trance that is witnessing Hermione’s breathtaking mind at work.

Hermione returns to the Great Hall with a spring in her step, certain that Theo and Draco will be able to brew an antidote. She’s unsure why they need an antidote, but something deep down tells her it is necessary. Over the years, Hermione had learned to trust her gut. Her intuition had saved her time and time again during her months in the tent with Ron and Harry.

When something feels not quite right, she now knows that it’s best to prepare for the worst.

While she hopes that this third and final task goes off without a hitch, she also can’t seem to shake the feeling that it won’t.

Caitlyn’s trial surprises many of those present, for there are no fantastic beasts present. Each and every champion encountered at least one so far, many of them cowering in fear at the sight. But Caitlyn does not seem to fear these beasts. No, she fears her father.

A tall man stands before her, his wand pointed at her face. He takes a swig from a bottle of liquor, his eyes rimmed in red. A woman cowers behind him, holding her legs tight to her core.

Hermione feels guilty for watching the scene, no doubt a very private matter for Caitlyn’s family. However, she is also well aware of the fact that Caitlyn’s father is a fairly well-known politician in North America—one with infamous anti-werewolf propaganda—and hopes that this depiction of his true character may sway his platform before the next election.

After Caitlyn delivers a swift punch to her father’s nose, the scene shifts. Caitlyn now sits at a small oak table.

Across the table sits Cassie.

“How could I ever love you?” Cassie spits, her arms crossed.

Hermione’s breath catches, the sight eerily familiar.

I have seen your heart and it is mine...

I have seen your dreams, Ronald Weasley, and I have seen your fears...

Least loved, by the mother who craved a daughter. Least loved, by the girl who prefers your friend...

We were better without you, happier without you.

Who could look at you beside Harry Potter? What are you, compared with the Chosen One...?

Though she had not experienced it firsthand, Harry had shown her his memory of the horcrux years ago. As she watches a very frightening Cassie yell at a sobbing Caitlyn, she knows that this is not a memory, but a fear.

Hermione finds her real goddaughter in the crowd, her face filled with rage. No doubt the witch feels frustrated. Frustrated because she knows she can't reassure Caitlyn, and promise her it's all fake. Frustrated because their personal relationship is being aired out to thousands of witches and wizards. Frustrated because the two of them have to go through this whole ordeal.

Eventually, Caitlyn is unable to complete her trial.

Though she manages to move past the Serum-Cassie encounter, it's sitting at a desk in MACUSA, surrounded by paperwork, the watchful stare of her father ever-present that sends her over the edge.

She has what only can be described as a panic attack as the stacks of parchment continue to grow, swallowing her whole.

She opens her eyes with a gasp and immediately runs into the open arms of Cassie.

Hermione smiles to herself as the pair embrace, joining in on the applause as they kiss one another with reckless abandon.

Midway through Mei's trial, Draco and Theo enter the Great Hall once more. Theo sends a thumbs up in her direction with a wild grin, his eyes quickly scanning the space for a certain herbology professor.

Hermione's mind becomes hazy as she observes Mei witness all sorts of horrors. She gasps as beasts she's never even fathomed appear on the screen before her, Mei flawlessly battling each one. Hermione thinks Mei might be the first champion to reach the end of the task, encountering each and every one of her fears.

That is, until the scene settles.

Mei now appears to be in a meadow of sorts, staring down at her reflection in a small pond.

The laugh of a little girl causes Mei to whip around, her eyes falling on a small child. The girl has a toothy grin with her hair tied into two pigtails with bright pink bows.

"Who are you?" the little girl asks.

"I'm you," the witch smiles, crouching down next to the girl.

"No, I'm me," the girl frowns.

“Well, I’m you in the future, when you’re a big girl,” Mei explains.

“Oh,” the girl smiles.

“Where is mother?” Mei asks, glancing around. She appears eager, excited even.

“Gone,” the girl whispers, her face stoic.

“You’re all alone,” Mei observes.

“Yes,” the girl nods.

“But you’re going to be okay?” Mei whispers, her intonation betraying her.

“I think so,” the girl smiles. “I’m very brave.”

“Yes, you are,” Mei smiles, tears forming in her eyes.

“But I’m scared,” the girl replies, her lip quivering.

“It’s okay to be scared,” Mei whispers. “Bravery is not the absence of fear.”

The little girl nods. “I don’t want to hurt any more people,” she whispers.

“You won’t,” Mei assures her, reaching her hand toward the small girl.

“I can’t help it,” the girl sobs.

“I know, I know,” Mei whispers, pulling the girl into a hug. She hums a song, her voice enveloping the pair.

Tremors rack the girl’s frame, her body shifting and twisting into an incorporeal, amorphous entity with the appearance of a black, fluid-like cloud, or a violent torrent of darkness, sometimes with a reddish core.

The dark mass picks up speed, the pond next to Mei rippling as a result.

“You’re okay Mei, you’re okay Mei,” she continues to whisper.

The obscurus comes barrelling toward Mei, but she does not flinch. Instead, she tilts her head back with her eyes closed. She opens her arms wide as if greeting an old friend.

The screen goes black.

But Mei’s eyes do not open.

Members of the ministry look on in horror, no doubt confused.

Hermione stands and marches towards a very perturbed-looking Cormac McClaggen.

“Well?” she spits. “What’s the plan McClaggen?”

“She should wake up,” he replies.

“And if she doesn’t? You bloody toe!” she shouts.

“Er, well...” the wizard starts, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to another.

“I will be giving her an antidote, capiche?” Hermione spits.

The wizard only nods.

Hermione summons the vial from Draco’s hand, marching towards the witch. Two ministry wizards attempt to stop her, but with a flick of her wrist, their bodies move swiftly out of her way.

Without waiting a single moment, Hermione pours the vial down the witch’s throat.

The next several seconds that pass seem infinitely longer than they should, each millisecond bleeding into the next.

Until, finally, the witch twitches as her eyes blow wide open.

Hermione gasps.

Professor Sakurai rushes towards his sister, pulling her into a hug. The witch cries, her entire body trembling in fear. The professor guides Mei toward Hermione, whispering in the girl’s ear.

Hermione lightly taps on the seat next to her, gesturing for the girl to join her. “It’s okay Miss Sakurai,” she smiles assuringly. Professor Sakurai takes a seat on the other side of the girl, sending a look of sadness in her direction. He removes a piece of parchment from his robes and brings his wand to his temple. Replicating an arch-like motion, his words appear on the parchment before him.

The parchment is passed to Hermione, who reads his perfect cursive.

Mei was eight when my family took her in. Her mother had nothing, and no way to care for her daughter. They were staying in the homes of those kind enough to offer them a place to stay, but more often than not, the homes of those with other intentions. Mei started showing signs of magic very young, and her mother, a muggle, feared her daughter. One night, when her mother was threatened, Mei’s obscurial emerged for the first time, wrecking havoc on the man who laid a hand on her. This happened multiple times, from what I’ve been told. Her mother abandoned her shortly after. It was I who found her in the streets of Kyoto. It took years of work with my parents, both scholars more than willing to help, but we managed to remove her obscurial. However, the guilt for the havoc she caused remains.

Tears burn Hermione’s eyes as she reads, wanting nothing more than to pull the witch into a hug. She’d had no idea that Mei was muggleborn. Not that it matters, but she finds it unnerving that like many other witches and wizards, she’d heard the last name Sakurai – a prominent Japanese pureblood family – and assumed the witch to be of their descent. Mei is an exceptionally powerful witch and her gold robes are evidence of this. She feels proud of Mei for overcoming everything she has encountered.

Hermione attempts to steady her breathing as Cassie approaches the centre of the Great Hall.

The last champion to attempt the trial.

All those present hold their breath as she downs the silvery liquid. Now, the task seems much more daunting than it had prior. Would this witch become stuck in this dream-like state as well?

The screen behind her comes to life, and a collective gasp fills the room.

There, on the ground, before Cassie is Caitlyn. However, it is a most gruesome sight. It's a sectumsempra curse, there is no doubt in Hermione's mind. The witch bleeds out from every angle, sobbing incoherently all the while. Cassie throws herself onto the ground, attempting to heal the witch to no avail.

"Why did you do this to me?" Caitlyn sobs, holding her palm over her heart.

"I didn't," Cassie replies, her attempts at healing still falling short.

Suddenly, Cassie's head snaps up as she takes in her surroundings. She closes her eyes and breathes.

"This isn't real," she whispers under her breath.

"Caitlyn is safe."

"You did not hurt her."

The scene shifts once more.

A large figure stands before Cassie, his stature towering over her. His black robes billow around him, the pointed hood casting a shadow over his mask.

A Death Eater mask.

"Cassandra," the man speaks, his voice low and raspy. "You have disappointed me."

"I am sorry, father," Cassandra whimpers, her shoulders hunched over.

"You are to stay in your room. Is that understood?" the man asks.

"Yes, father," Cassie nods, releasing an audible breath.

The man laughs to himself. "Oh, don't sound so relieved Cassandra."

Cassie looks up at him with fear in her eyes.

"Crucio!" the man shouts, his wand pointed at his daughter.

But instead of beginning to scream, Cassie remains silent.

Hermione feels more tears stream down her face, her breath short. Draco shakes ever so slightly next to her. This scene is likely all too real for him.

But, behind her, she hears shouting.

"Get my daughter out of there!" Sirius bellows, his body being restrained by his husband. He has a frenzied sort of look in his eyes, one that reminds Hermione momentarily of his wanted posters after his escape from Azkaban.

“Pads, she’s okay, she’ll get through it,” Remus assures him.

Sure enough, Cassie whispers under her breath, “this isn’t real.”

“He can’t hurt you.”

“You are safe.”

The scene shifts once more.

Cassie finds herself in a forest.

She whips her head around, confused. Hermione wonders if perhaps this forest is familiar to her.

A howl rings out in the distance. Instantly, Cassie sets off toward the source of the noise.

The howl becomes louder as the minutes wear on until Cassie comes to a screeching halt.

Now, however, the howl shifts into whimpers.

There, on the ground, is a werewolf.

But not just any werewolf.

Remus.

Blood pools around the werewolf, a large gash on its side.

Cassie throws herself onto the ground next to her father, beginning to sob almost immediately.

“It’s okay dad, you’re okay,” she whispers.

She waves her wand, attempting to seal the gash in its side. But the werewolf continues to tremble, shaking and whimpering.

“Dad, stay with me, okay?” Cassie begs. She casts a tempus charm, “it’s almost sunrise, okay dad? I’ll take you to St Mungo’s as soon as you transform back. I need you to stay with me.”

The werewolf continues to shake and Cassie continues to cry.

The entire audience remains silent, their eyes wide at the sight.

All the other champions had run in fear from their magical beasts, but not Cassie. She had run towards him.

Now, however, it is Remus that shouts. “Get her OUT!” he yells, barrelling towards his daughter.

Two ministry officials bar his way, and Hermione watches in horror as Remus lifts his wand, as if to engage in a duel. She isn’t surprised. Werewolves are fiercely protective of their cubs. Their pack.

“Hey, hey, Moony!” Sirius says as he shakes his husband. “She’ll be okay, remember?”

Remus’s breath slows, his breath still heaving.

Cassie siphons the blood of the werewolf rather than healing him entirely. She has no idea what had caused such a wound. Typically, werewolves self-heal within moments.

“Stay with me, dad,” she whispers, looking anxiously toward the sun.

Casting another tempus spell, she gasps. Shaking her head, she tries again.

The time has not moved.

“No sunrise,” she whispers, choking on her own tears.

The werewolf stills, its eyes beginning to close.

“No, dad, no!” Cassie screams, anxiously attempting to heal him again.

“Come on dad, we can figure this out!” she shouts.

Hermione begins to shake, their only antidote now gone. She’s certain that she could ask Draco and Theo to create another, but is unsure whether or not they would have time to do so.

Because this encounter for Cassie does not seem to be fading. No, if anything, the witch is clinging to this fear for dear life, refusing to leave.

It is painfully evident that the ministry had not run sufficient trials for the brew, a horrifying thought for Hermione.

What if Cassie faces permanent brain damage from their negligence?

Cassie continues to sob and shake her father for the next several moments that come to pass.

Sirius relents in his attempts to calm Remus, now joining in on the shouting, his wand pointed in Cormac’s direction.

Students begin to shout, the Slytherin Quidditch team all standing, attempting to get to their friend. All of those present in the hall appear to be uncomfortable with the sight, some even horrified.

Suddenly, the hall falls into silence as McGonagall waves her hands in front of her. She marches toward Cassie, her brow furrowed.

Two guards attempt to stop her, but with a flick of her wrist, she barrels through.

“Cassandra,” she whispers, placing the back of her hand on the witch’s forehead.

“Cassandra,” she repeats once more. This time, however, she places the tip of her wand on the witch’s temple.

“Woah!” Sirius exclaims. “Minnie, what are you doing?”

Minerva whips her head around, a look of fury on her face. “I will not lose another student to these blasted tournaments. I. Will. Not.”

Sirius and Remus silently nod, knowing deep down that the woman who had played a large part in raising them would not harm their daughter.

Minerva begins to mumble an incantation under her breath, her eyes closed and head tilted back. A small wisp emerges from her wand, a tabby cat.

Soon, an otter comes to join the tabby, followed by a black dog, a toad, and a wolf. A dragon flies toward the witch, circling over her head. Within moments, more than fifty wispy creatures circle the witch. A white hare comes hopping along, coming to a stop a single inch from Cassie's eyes.

Hermione watches in awe as Luna's patronus steps forward, disappearing into the witch's green irises.

Suddenly, Cassie stills.

She closes her eyes.

"This isn't real," she whispers.

"Dad is safe."

"You are safe."

"Dad is alive."

A white hare appears next to her and twitches its ears.

"Hello," Cassie smiles.

Her eyes open again, this time in the Great Hall.

All those present erupt into cheers. Some cheer because they are impressed by Cassie's ability to pull herself out of the mental state, while others cheer because they are glad that this whole ordeal is done and over with.

Remus and Sirius launch themselves at their daughter, squeezing her in a bone-crushing hug.

It takes several moments for the crowd to settle, but finally, Professor McGonagall clears her throat and casts a sonorous spell. Hermione watches as McClaggen is escorted from the hall, no doubt the work of the Headmistress.

"The judges have reached a decision!" McGonagall declares. "We have a winner."

The hall falls silent, all those present practically holding their breath.

"The winner of the first-ever International Confederation of Wizards Championship is..."

Hermione watches Cassie and Caitlyn share a small smile.

"Mei Sakurai!"

The hall erupts into cheers, fireworks exploding overhead.

For a moment, Hermione worries that Cassie will be terribly upset by the fact that she hasn't won, but as she watches her goddaughter's reaction, she knows that this is certainly not the case.

Cassie and Caitlyn rush towards their friend, throwing themselves into her arms. “I failed!” Cassie grins. “I failed!” she laughs again, this time much louder. There is no venom to her words, only joy for her friend.

Mei’s eyes begin to water, laughing alongside her friends. The three jump up and down, Mei hoisting the trophy overhead.

Cassie had felt a twinge of disappointment. At first.

The feeling is swiftly washed away by a contented serenity as she takes in her godmother, friends, teammates, and girlfriend. She realises that she isn't so disappointed at all.

She's happy. With or without an oversized cup.

“I’m so proud of you,” Hermione grins, placing a kiss on her goddaughter’s forehead. “You don't need that trophy Cass, you were brilliant.”

Cassie smiles, for she knows that her godmother is correct as always.

“I suppose it’s sort of nice isn’t it?” she whispers, her eyes locked on Mei. “She’s the first-ever muggleborn to win.”

Hermione smiles, nodding silently as tears glisten in her eyes.

Cassie has been chasing after *more* for as long as she can remember. But, on this tirade for *more* , she’d failed to realise that perhaps she already had all that she needs.

Now, this sounds awfully cheesy, and she certainly won’t be admitting to this anytime soon, but Cassie believes that perhaps all she needs is those around her.

She doesn’t need to be the best, to win every award, or revelled for her triumphs. She doesn’t need people to think she’s the greatest, to be completely knocked out and dazzled, perhaps even slightly intimidated by her.

No.

She has nothing to prove.

Especially not to those she loves.

Chapter End Notes

did anyone catch the subtle fantastic mr. fox reference at the end? I adore that movie sm I had to.

Massages for Dummies

Chapter Notes

Hello! My apologies for the delayed uploads. As I mentioned, this fic is NOT abandoned whatsoever, my writing speed is just a little slower.

I hope you enjoy this chapter, we are so close to the finish line!

Thank you again for all your comments, kudos, and support :)

As always, beta love to whits_end, likelyunfinished and callcalypso ♡

It was entirely too poetic when Cassie's magical genealogy results arrived via owl the day after the third and final task. The pecking on the window was persistent but seamlessly incorporated into Cassie's dream.

She walks down a long forest path, one lit only by the sunbeams pushing through the leaves ahead. Dressed in her Hogwarts robes, her Slytherin green tie loose enough that someone would no doubt deduct house points. A peaceful ambience permeates the air as she meanders through the forest, no ounce of anxiety or worry present to plague her mind. She arrives at a small cottage, one that appears to be built into a tree itself.

It reminds her of some books she read to her nieces and nephews – small forest creatures who live in the base of trees, eating carrot soup while wrapped in knitted blankets. She's often thought that she would like to live such a monotonous existence, but is simultaneously aware of the fact that she would likely go barny.

But no matter, the pecking on the window appears in her dream as a knock. Her own, that is. She wraps her knuckles against the wooden door three times and stands back to wait.

The door swings open, and a familiar woman greets her there. The curly-haired witch is familiar in the sense that she evokes some deep sort of emotion in Cassie's heart. It isn't that she knows who she is per se, but rather is aware of the fact that this woman is *something* to her – almost like a déjà vu.

"Oh my dear Cassandra," the woman smiles. "I am so proud of you."

Cassie finds herself crying, though it isn't necessarily a sad sort of cry, but one of relief.

"Hi mum," she mumbles.

"You're just as beautiful as always," the woman gushes, taking Cassie's cheeks into her outstretched palm.

"I'm sorry," Cassie sniffles.

“Whatever are you sorry for?” her mother asks.

“He hurt you, didn’t he?” Cassie asks, vision blurry.

“Yes, but that certainly wasn’t your responsibility, my dear Cassandra,” she smiles, dragging her thumb across Cassie’s cheek.

“I greeted death as an old friend when it was my time. My only regret was leaving you behind.”

Cassie remains silent at this, her brow furrowed.

“Now, go *live* my dear Cassandra. I am so proud of you. We will meet again someday, but please, do not dwell on the past even when you have found the answer to your questions.”

The moment the words leave the raven-haired witch’s lips, the scene spins, and Cassie is back in her childhood bedroom.

“Babe, there’s an owl here for you,” Caitlyn smiles, standing from the bed with only a sheet wrapped around her torso. The blonde greets the owl with a smile, offering him a small pat on the head before untying a large envelope from his talon.

Her eyes go wide as she reads the envelope. “Magical Genealogy Services!” she exclaims.

Cassie sits upright in bed, her heart pounding. The details of her dream begin to evade her, her mother’s face slipping into the ether once more. Without speaking a word, she reaches her hand towards Caitlyn, wrapping her quilt around her chest.

She rips the envelope open, three separate pieces of parchment tumbling onto her bed.

The first is a letter.

Dear Miss Lupin-Black,

On behalf of MGS, I would like to thank you for taking the time to complete your genealogical testing. As you may know, many family lines were crossed or erased after the war, and the best way for our magical records to be maintained is by piecing the puzzle pieces back together.

I was very fortunate to have your profile arrive on my desk, for your case is one that has been discussed for years amongst the wizarding historians such as myself who were tasked with rectifying our records after the war.

Many children who were orphaned by the war were dealt with in a manner that we hope is never replicated. Though there is no doubt that those who were assigned to help had only positive intentions, the circumstances were less than desirable. As I filter through the records of your adoption, it is clear that the focus was to find you a new home at all costs, while very little thought was given to your old life. There are a few different ways I could explain what occurred with pretty analogies, but I feel it best to tell this to you as directly as possible.

Those in charge did not seem to care about your past at all, perhaps assuming that you would have no interest in the details of your lineage due to their association with Voldemort. While I can perhaps understand why they may have assumed this, from a genealogical and historical standpoint, this was a huge setback.

As the laws stand, we are unable to reach out to adoptees and ask for them to create genealogical testing. In other words, we must wait for you to come to us.

Now, I'm sure you're muttering under your breath, wishing I would get to the point, but I have one last thing to say.

I am at your disposal, should you need any assistance. I say this because your genealogy results not only answer questions you no doubt had, but those of the Ministry and Gringotts as well.

I am unsure of your current financial situation, Cassandra, but please know these results will likely impact your life quite positively.

All the best,

Ismelda Meads

The next is a thick piece of parchment, the word CONFIDENTIAL stamped on the folded exterior in bright red ink.

Tossing the letter to Caitlyn, who had been working herself into a fit for the past several minutes, Cassie tears this parchment open.

Small lines start to form at the bottom of the page – roots. The roots continue to twist and turn, forming a trunk. Cassie watches with bated breath as her family tree forms before her, branches spreading out in every which direction.

She notices several names from the infamous Sacred 28, the Avery family, and the Bulstrodes. She sees the Gaunts and the Flint family. The Lestranges, the Greengrass family, the Parkinsons, the Rosiers, and the Selwyns. She smiles to herself when she sees the Malfoy and Black family names.

The flow of the tree starts to slow, arriving at a small name in the top right corner, the end of a lineage.

Cassandra Dolohov.

Born to Antonin Dolohov and Nora Flint.

Cassie feels her breath hitch and her heart rate quickens.

Dolohov.

Antonin Dolohov. A Dark wizard. One of Lord Voldemort's Death Eaters. Considered a very powerful wizard.

Cassie had heard plenty of tales about this man, a man she refuses to refer to as her father.

She knows that he fought in the First Wizarding War, during which he tortured many Muggles, and wizards and witches who were not supporters of the Dark Lord. Along with four other Death Eaters, he participated in the murders of Fabian and Gideon Prewett – Molly's brothers. This fact alone horrifies her. Dear Molly, who has been a loving figure in her life for as long as she can remember — how will she take the news? And to think, Cassie's own flesh and blood was responsible for the death of hers.

If she can recall correctly, Dolohov was caught, convicted of these crimes, and sentenced to life imprisonment in Azkaban. He escaped from prison after Voldemort's return during the mass break-out of 1996 and participated in the Battle of the Department of Mysteries.

Cassie can recall her godmother telling her the tale of the Department of Mysteries. During this battle, Dolohov began to alert the other Death Eaters as to their location and Hermione used Silencing Charm on him to prevent it. He retaliated with an unnamed curse which, despite being weaker than normal because it was cast non-verbally, severely injured Hermione. Her godmother ended up in St Mungos for several days after suffering internal damage. Her abdomen bears a gruesome scar to this day.

Cassie remembers quite well how much fury she had felt towards this wizard when Hermione had recounted the story. Cassie has always been exceptionally protective of her godmother, though she knows the witch is more than capable of protecting herself. She'd been furious to learn that she had been hurt and had sworn she would hunt this man down.

Her hatred for this wizard had been made significantly worse after learning that he had also injured Remus during the Battle of Hogwarts. Her father had been mere millimetres from death, ending up in St Mungos for multiple days with his injuries.

Cassie had stood from the sofa, demanding to know what had happened to this horrid wizard, once again declaring that she, at the ripe age of 12, would take him down herself.

Her fathers had chuckled at her outburst and had assured her that the man had died during the Battle of Hogwarts.

This, however, hadn't felt like enough in Cassie's mind, even back then. This wizard deserved to suffer, not escape punishment for his crimes.

Now, she realises this man she has long possessed an unseemly hatred for is her... father.

Though she remembered very little of her childhood, she could remember the overwhelming sense of fear she'd felt around her father.

And now, she remembers how poorly her mother had been treated as well.

A horrid, horrid man.

And she carries his genes.

She stands quickly and runs to the lavatory, her stomach churning at the realisation.

Cassie remains on the cold tile for the better part of an hour before there is a knock at the door.

"Okay Cass, that's enough dramatics. Open the door," she hears in Remus's kind tone.

"I just need a minute," Cassie replies weakly.

"You open this door right now, young lady!" Sirius shouts.

"Cass, I didn't tell them any details but I think you should talk to them about it," Caitlyn adds.

Cassie sighs, wanting nothing more than to remain in a state of well-deserved dramatics a little while longer. But a moment later, she allows the door to swing open.

There stand her fathers and Caitlyn, and despite the plethora of emotions coursing through her veins, she smiles.

Suddenly, Hermione comes sprinting up the rickety wooden staircase, her hair a frazzled mess.

“Is she ok?” Hermione shouts, coming to a halt as she arrives at the bathroom scene.

Remus glances at Hermione, confused.

Sirius looks sheepishly at his feet, “I may have sent a patronus. I was worried she would need Mione...” he admits.

“Sirius, Cass is a grown witch now,” Hermione laughs.

“You always know what to say!” Sirius exclaims.

“Yes, well, since we’re all here now, there’s something you should know,” Cassie cuts in, her eyes downcast. It is oddly convenient that her godmother had arrived. Hermione is one of the few people Cassie had been anxious to tell of the results.

The room falls into silence, and all those present eerily still.

“I took a magical genealogy test,” Cassie begins. “And I just received my results.”

Her fathers nod, and she watches as Hermione’s eyes find the piece of parchment clasped in her hands.

Cassie opens her mouth again, ready to tell those that she loves most about her heinous ancestry. But Remus speaks first.

“You don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to, Cass. This information won’t change anything. You are our daughter and we will love you no matter which family you were born into. Remember that.”

Cassie starts to cry once more, the dry skin on her cheeks stinging from all the tears she’d already shed. “I know,” she replies, nodding her head. “I’m a Dolohov.”

The room is silent for a moment longer, her fathers, godmother, and girlfriend processing the information.

Hermione is the first to react, sitting carefully next to the witch and pulling her into a tight hug. She knows Cassie well enough to know that the witch is no doubt feeling guilty for the pain Hermione had suffered at the hands of her father. “I love you Cass, more than life itself, you know that right?” she whispers. “I’m always having to remind people they are so much more than their familial ties. You are not a Dolohov. You are a Lupin. You are a Black. You, just like your father, are so much more than your magical lineage. Okay?” Hermione smiles, placing a gentle kiss on her cheek.

“If anything, Cass, I’m happy to know that I got to be one of the wizards to raise you, instead of that horrid man,” Remus smiles. “I’m happy that Pads and I got the honour of having you as our daughter.”

Now, everyone in the room is sobbing, clinging to one another as if their lives depend on it.

Caitlyn carefully clears her throat a moment later. “Um, Cass, there’s the last part...” she smiles, handing a parchment to her girlfriend. “It’s from Gringotts.”

Hesitantly, Cassie accepts the parchment, skimming the legal jargon until her eyes land on a sum of money.

1,500,000 galleons.

She gasps, and without a word, she hands the letter to her fathers.

Sirius’s eyes blow wide. “Well, it looks like you won’t be needing your Black family inheritance anymore will you, Miss Cass?” he chuckles.

“I will, actually,” she replies with a devilish grin. “Because I have something else in mind for all of that,” she smiles, gesturing to the letter.

Hermione once again counts her lucky stars for the existence of Narcissa Malfoy.

Planning the yearly gala for the Muggleborn Integration Program has always been a great source of anxiety for Hermione. She dreads the whole ordeal, planning which linens to rent and what food should be on the menu. She hates planning the decor and booking a band of some kind.

But this year, she didn’t even have to lift a finger.

After the success of planning the Yule Ball, Narcissa Malfoy had been more than happy to plan the entire Gala.

As Hermione enters the Great Hall by Draco’s side, she knows she couldn’t have come even close to pulling off what Narcissa had.

The theme is simple: the night sky.

The ceiling is, of course, enchanted. However, the replica of the night sky outside is no longer restricted to above and instead reaches down towards the floors, the entire room feeling as if it is made of the cosmos.

The floor is charmed to appear as clouds, the scene so realistic that for a moment Hermione is certain that perhaps she really is in the night sky amongst the stars.

Some of her fourth-year students, the first of those to experience the Muggleborn Integration Program, wave to her as she enters the room. She is more than eager to hear their speeches about the importance of the program, but has no doubt that she will cry as a result.

As she takes her seat, she grabs Draco’s hand under the table, needing a reassuring squeeze. She knows she should be making rounds at the moment, thanking all the donors to assure that they continue donating a small portion of their vaults for years to come.

But, right now, she really doesn’t care to. She is, of course, ever so thankful for their donations, but she can’t help but find comfort in the fact that they now have an added 1.5 million galleons for the program, courtesy of her goddaughter.

Cassie made quick work of retrieving her galleons from the Dolohov family vault and placing them directly into the Muggleborn Integration Program fund.

Cassie has no need for such galleons and firmly believes that they would be much better suited to supporting the very people her birth family sought to eradicate. As such, she did not donate anonymously and was adamant that she receives a large plaque with the Dolohov Family plastered across the front. She hopes that that is enough to make her “father” roll over in his (lack of) grave.

The first speech of the evening is delivered by Hannah Knottingley, a fourth-year Hufflepuff.

“When Professor Granger arrived on my doorstep all those years ago, I was frightened at first,” she begins, shifting nervously from one foot to another.

“I was always frightened of everything growing up. I felt out of place – like I didn’t belong, and that was scary. But the minute Professor Granger entered my home, this warm sense of calm set into my very being, and for the first time, I felt like maybe I didn’t need to be scared.”

It is then that Hermione bursts into tears for the first time that evening.

Aiden Ewhurst, a fourth-year Gryffindor, is the next to speak.

“I can’t even imagine having come to Hogwarts without the integration program in place,” he begins, launching into tales of just how impactful the experience was for both he and his parents.

Hermione continues to cry, standing to hug each of the students as their speeches conclude. However, as she returns to her seat after the third and final speech, she passes Draco on the way. She looks at him with a confused sort of look, to which he offers only a smile in return.

He takes the stage with the grace of many years of pureblood etiquette training and begins to speak. “Thank you all for being here this evening,” he smiles. “As some of you may know, I am the Potions Master here at Hogwarts, but I am also a proud supporter of the Muggleborn Integration Program.”

Hermione’s eyes go wide, everything clicking into place.

The anonymous donor, as it turns out, isn’t an elderly witch after all.

“In fact, I have been a supporter of this program since the very beginning, because when I heard of the initiative Mrs Granger had created, there was no doubt in my mind that it would be more than worthy of any galleons I could muster. Now, some of you may be shaking your heads at the sight of my awfully pale blonde hair or my family name, wondering why on earth a Malfoy would be willing to donate our galleons to such a cause. However, I believe it is not in spite of, but rather *because* of my family name that these galleons are donated year after year to this cause. Galleons certainly aren’t everything. However, you and I both know that they can certainly make a difference.”

All of those present nod their heads in agreement, knowing quite well that galleons do, unfortunately, make the world go around.

“I donate not in an effort to restore my family name but rather in an effort to repair the damage that it has caused. I donate because I wish I could go back in time and slap my younger self across the

face for the ways I spoke to and treated Mrs Granger, something she made quick work of in our third year.”

Draco pauses for a moment, the audience laughing to themselves, their expressions softening.

“I donate because every single witch and wizard deserves a chance to be educated at Hogwarts, no matter their lineage. I donate because some of the brightest witches and wizards I know are muggleborn. I donate because this program is making the world a better place, a world that I certainly want to be a part of building.”

Hermione feels like she may blackout as Draco continues to speak. Her wizard continues to surprise her every single day. She catches Narcissa’s eye from across the room, who winks in reply.

“So thank you all for being here and continuing to support this program. It is a beautiful thing,” Draco concludes. With that, he smiles and lifts his champagne flute into the air in front of him. The audience lifts their glasses in turn, and applause erupts from every inch of the Great Hall.

2007 is the year with the highest donations to date, and Hermione can’t stop crying.

She does not give a speech at the Gala, mostly because she never wanted the program to be about her. At first, McGonagall had suggested that the scholarship be called the *Hermione Granger Scholarship for Muggleborn Witches and Wizards*, but apart from this being an awful mouthful of a name, she had been adamant that her name not be used whatsoever.

Hermione had had her time in the spotlight, and she is quite happy to stay out of it for the time being. She wants to make a difference, this much is certain, but more as an organiser than anything else.

The rest of the evening passes in a blur of food, dancing, and exchanging pleasantries. By the time the clock strikes midnight, and all the guests begin to make the trek from the castle to Hogsmeade to Portkey or apparate home, Hermione feels as if she might collapse from exhaustion.

“Would you like to accompany me on a walk?” Draco asks, bowing dramatically.

“I’m so tired Draco, can we just go to bed?” Hermione replies, refreshing the cushioning charm on her shoes.

She catches a look of disappointment flash across his features for only a moment, which confuses her greatly. Surely a walk wasn’t the be-all and end-all of the evening?

“Yes, that’s fine, love,” he smiles, though she can tell his expression is forced.

They meander through the corridors in silence, eventually arriving at Hermione’s living quarters. “Can you put some tea on while I shower?” she asks, though they both know it’s hardly an optional request.

Draco nods, busying himself with the kettle and Hermione’s special herbal blends.

He listens intently as the shower springs to life, the water beginning to beat against the tile. As he flicks his wand and pours the water over the tea leaves, he releases a sigh.

He had a whole ordeal planned for the evening, one that would eventually lead to his proposal. This had been his third attempt, each foiled somehow before they could occur. There had been the week prior at dinner when Ginny and Harry had appeared out of nowhere. Then, there had been the breakfast picnic he had planned with the house elves, postponed when Hermione had been called to the Headmistress's office to deal with a homesick muggleborn first year.

He'd been determined that tonight would be the night. He didn't want to wait a moment longer.

But the moment he'd seen the look of pure exhaustion on his witch's face, he'd known this plan was null and void. He feels slightly disappointed, mostly because their evening had been meticulously planned. But, there is of course the fact that he is quite sick of having to refer to Hermione as his girlfriend, and not his fiancée.

He mumbles to himself, already beginning to plan his next big attempt when the door to the bathroom swings open.

Hermione walks out, her hair sopping wet against her shoulders, a plush pink towel wrapped around her chest. "I feel like a new witch," she grins, small droplets of water pooling around her feet. Draco had found it peculiar at first, that she doesn't simply cast a drying charm the moment she steps out of the shower. But, over time, this had become one of Hermione's muggle ways that he has grown to adore. There is something delectable about a sopping-wet Hermione, a thought that he does not wish to unpack at this time.

"Still the same swot," he winks, levitating her piping hot mug of tea toward her.

"Will you give me a back massage?" she asks cheekily.

Draco makes a show of checking his watch before looking up to meet her glance. "I suppose I could make time for one," he sighs dramatically.

"Okay," Hermione smiles, walking toward her bedroom, allowing the towel to fall to the ground around her as she does before quickly peeking over her shoulder.

Draco immediately follows, more than happy to oblige to any of the witch's requests.

"Thank you," she smiles, tossing herself onto the bed.

Draco feels his skin grow hot at the sight of Hermione wiggling into position, adjusting the pillows around her head and laying flat on her stomach.

Massages had become somewhat of a routine for a pair. At first, Hermione's request for one had been genuine, her back sore from her countless hours of teaching.

But, when Draco had slipped his hand between her thighs after thirty minutes of contact, Hermione had known she would be asking for back massages *much* more frequently.

And so, Draco begins his back massage routine, one that is almost second nature to him at this point. He starts with the muggle massage techniques he'd learned from a bright yellow book entitled "MASSAGES FOR DUMMIES", working the knots out of Hermione's shoulders, and smoothing out the tension along her spine. Once he can feel the witch relax and sink into the mattress beneath her, however, he moves on to other pursuits.

First, he drags a singular digit along her back, tracing runes and words alike. He likes to leave her secret messages here, such as confessions of his love. He's certain that the witch knows what he is writing, but likes to pretend it's a secret nonetheless.

Then, he moves on to his personal favourite part of the task. Starting at the base of her spine, Draco begins to lick and kiss every inch of the witch's back. Hermione usually begins to squirm at this point, anticipating what's to come. Draco takes great pride in his ability to tease Hermione for countless moments, brushing her hair behind her ear and whispering sweet nothings for only them to hear.

Sometimes, Hermione grows impatient and practically begs him to move on. These are his favourite times, mostly because he will then take even longer at this step than he'd originally planned. He loves nothing more than seeing the witch writhe beneath him before he's even laid a hand between her thighs.

Tonight, as luck would have it, she groans into her pillow, threatening to hex him if he doesn't get a move on. She tries to open her legs slightly in invitation, but Draco silently pushes them closed once more.

"Screw you," she mutters, though she secretly enjoys it.

After many more moments that feel like a millennium to Hermione, Draco finally lowers himself between her legs. He starts at her calves, kissing and licking as he so pleases. He takes his time, slowly and almost painfully making his way up her legs. She's practically shaking by the time he arrives at her sex, and he smiles to himself as he finally places his tongue on her bundle of nerves.

She groans in relief the minute he makes contact, arching her back ever so slightly. "Please," she whispers, pushing herself toward his tongue.

"Patience," he whispers into her sex, placing his palms on her rear. Kneading her arse, he begins with long, leisurely licks, flicking his tongue as he reaches her clit.

"My perfect witch," he whispers against her sex, causing her to open herself to his touch, beginning to grind herself against his tongue with need, thighs shaking in anticipation.

Hermione mumbles incoherently, the occasional "please" decipherable amongst the jumble of words.

Draco happily obliges, sliding two fingers up her slit, teasing her with his tongue continues to lick at her clit. He inserts his fingers slowly, causing the witch to release a pleasure-filled moan, her tone and intonation remarkably swotty for the bedroom.

Draco continues to pump his fingers in and out of her at a rhythmic pace, quite enjoying himself. He begins to twist his fingers in a semi-circular motion, his tongue ever-moving against her clit. After forty-five minutes of anticipation, Hermione reaches her release quite quickly, something that Draco takes great pride in.

She lays face down for a moment longer, mumbling into the pillow.

"Up you get," Draco whispers, brushing her hair over her shoulder. He casts a quick-drying charm on her curls, knowing that she'll be less than pleased when they awaken if she falls asleep with wet hair.

“I can’t,” she groans dramatically, slowly inching over to her side of the bed.

Her rule of not sleeping together while at work had quickly gone out the window. In fact, Draco can hardly remember the last time he slept in his own quarters.

He watches as the witch arranges herself, tucking her right arm under her pillow and bending her left knee. Draco happily tucks himself into bed next to her, falling into the absolute euphoria that is her scent.

He glances around the room, smiling to himself as his eyes land on the cluttered bookshelf that is piled high with worn, tired books. He admires Hermione’s personal library, viewing it almost as an extension of the witch’s mind. The same volumes that had sat new and in pristine condition in Oxford now possess cracked spines and worn pages. All those years ago, he’d stared at her bookshelf from a similar position. As Hermione drifted to sleep, her chest rising and falling, he’d sworn he’d never be as happy as he was at that very moment. The smell of strawberries and honey had enveloped him in an identical fashion, and it was then that he knew he wanted to marry her someday.

Tonight, as the moonlight peeks through her window, Draco finds himself wide awake. He stares at the ceiling above them, relishing the feeling of simply existing next to his witch. He’s certain that if he’d had a sleeping arrangement akin to this after the war, he wouldn’t have needed to create felix memorias at all. Something about her slow and steady breath steadies Draco with this overall sense of warmth. However, it is important to note that it is not warmth in a temperature sense per se, but internal coziness. He feels as if Hermione is a patch of sunlight, one he would like to bask in until the end of time, should she allow it.

As his mind slips down a path of no return, reflecting on every inconsequential moment with his witch, Draco realizes something – something he should have realized from the start.

Hermione is not one for grand gestures.

In fact, he thinks she would have likely hated his original plan for the evening.

She would have of course, never expressed such a thing, but he curses himself for even considering it.

Pureblood families always prioritize grandiose proposals, most likely because they are an excellent opportunity to showcase one’s wealth. Growing up, Draco had always assumed he would one day propose to a witch in some extravagant fashion, likely with fireworks and a live band involved, perhaps a private chalet in the alps, or an island purchased just for the occasion.

But, in his youth, these thoughts had typically involved some faceless pureblood witch, one he had not chosen for himself.

Now, however, there are no expectations driving him forward, only his own desires.

And the witch that he hopes will accept his proposal is not some faceless pureblood. No, Hermione Granger would certainly not expect nor desire such an egregious display of wealth.

His heart rate begins to speed with this realisation. “Hermione?” he whispers, emboldened, turning to face her.

“Mhm,” she mumbles in reply.

He wandlessly summons a small black box from his robes.

“Can I ask you something?” he asks, propping himself up against his pillow.

She turns toward him, her brow furrowed. “Is everything okay?” she asks, her voice groggy.

There is a singular moment of silence, the air between the pair growing electric in anticipation. Both Hermione and Draco hold their breath for what seems like a millennium. Hermione opens her mouth to demand a reply, but before the first syllable can escape her lips, Draco finally speaks the words he’d been desperate to ask since their very first night together, all those years ago.

“Will you marry me?” he smiles, opening the box.

There, nestled among black velvet, is a small ring. Theo had encouraged Draco to take the largest diamond from his vault, but he’d known better. After hours of searching, Draco had nearly given up. Everything in the Malfoy family vaults was too gaudy, too large, and too extravagant.

He wanted something elegant, yes, but not flashy or flamboyant. He wanted something simple, something beautiful.

He’d nearly skipped over the ring entirely, the simplicity of the stone pale in comparison to the other ostentatious options.

With three diamonds mirroring on either side in a cluster, the bevelled edges hold the moss gemstone in a gentle hug of six prongs. The ring itself is gold, the colour he most associates with his witch. The ring was perfect, much like she was.

Hermione blinks, staring at him with a confused sort of expression, and for a moment, Draco feels his heart drop into his stomach. Had he assumed incorrectly? Did Hermione want a big proposal with musicians and fireworks?

“Erm, should we pretend like this never happened?” he whispers, beginning to tuck the box away once more.

Suddenly, her hand shoots out, grabbing the box from his hands.

“Am I dreaming?” she whispers, inspecting the ring.

Draco shakes his head in confusion.

“Surely I have drifted off into the land of Morpheus if Draco Malfoy is finally proposing,” she smiles cheekily.

She hands the box back to him with a grin.

He accepts it, staring at her dumbfounded, unsure how he’s supposed to proceed.

“Well, are you going to put it on my finger or do I have to do it myself?” Hermione asks, extending her hand toward him.

Unable to produce a single word, Draco quickly removes the ring from the box and slides it onto her finger, the band magically sizing itself.

“It’s beautiful, Draco, I love it,” she smiles, inspecting the ring once more.

Suddenly, he feels the need to explain himself, though the words roll off his tongue in a jumble of nonsense. “I had a plan... fireworks... but, er... Theo wanted a bigger one... I liked this one... reminded me of you... I was going to do it.... Er on the walk earlier... couldn’t wait any longer I ‘spose...”

“Draco,” she smiles, silencing him. “It’s perfect, you’re perfect.”

She places a gentle kiss on his lips, keeping her nose pressed against his, their eyes crossing as they stare at one another. “Besides, I have a feeling that the wedding will be grandiose enough on its own,” she giggles.

Draco only nods, finding that he can’t seem to parse together the morphemes to adequately express what he is feeling at that moment

“I love you, Draco,” she smiles.

“I love *you* , Hermione,” he smiles in return.

As Hermione nestles into Draco’s chest, happily fiddling with the ring on her finger, she releases a contented sigh.

Both are certain that no matter what is occurring in the world around them, they are exactly where they are meant to be. It’s as if they can feel their souls melting into one another, their very existence becoming one. Their minds begin to drift away into their dreams, but both continue to smile nonetheless, for they know they will encounter one another once more upon their arrival.

Family Ties

Chapter Notes

Welcome back, everyone! We are so close to the finish line, I hope you enjoy this chapter :)

Beta love to whits_end ♡

One fine summer's day, Hermione finds herself walking through the corridors of Hogwarts with a spring in her step. In one hand, she clasps an iced coffee — made just the way she likes it with a splash of caramel. Her other hand is very much occupied, holding a large stack of parchment to her chest.

She smiles at the portraits as she walks past, eager to reach her office. Today is perhaps one of Professor Granger's favourite days of the year: the day she plans her visits for the Muggleborn Integration Program.

As she arrives in the charms corridor, the door of her office swings open in welcome. The sun is peeking through the stained glass window at such an angle it illuminates the room in a kaleidoscope of colours. She places her coffee on her coaster — one made for her by a student as a yule gift — and waves her wand in an arc-like motion. Immediately, her record player springs to life, the sounds of her current favourite album bouncing off of the walls and reaching her ears.

She scoots her chair toward her desk and waves her wand to project a calendar of the summer months in the air before her. The eight short weeks appear, and with a small smile, she blocks off one weekend in particular. Narcissa Malfoy had made quick work of contacting Hermione to plan all the details of their wedding, a task that she was more than happy to delegate. Within a day, Narcissa had owled Hermione, asking for her to meet for tea at the Foggy Bean.

There, much like their first planning encounter, Narcissa had presented a binder of sorts with colour schemes, potential menus, bands, vendors, and venues. Draco had happily tagged along for a visit but did not partake in the planning process. No, he was quite happy to sit back, drink his coffee and observe as the two women he loves most in this world interacted in a frenzy of joy.

In the end, they decided on August 11th for their wedding ceremony. The event was to take place at the Zabini Estate in Italy, a magnificent venue that Hermione is more than eager to visit.

So, with the weekend of the eleventh blocked off with small pink hearts, Hermione sets to planning each and every one of her visits. As predicted, the number of muggleborn students has continued to grow. This coming year, there are to be fifteen students joining them, three more than the year prior. Hermione grins as she realizes a set of twins is on her list. There is, of course, the fact that they would be entering this unknown world together, something Hermione wishes would be the reality for all siblings. However, there is also the fact that she is able to combine their visits into one.

She continues to skim the list until her eyes come to a screeching halt, stumbling over a name that appears far too familiar.

Her brain whirs in realization, a memory of a much younger Harry complaining about his terrible aunt and uncle appearing at the forefront of her mind.

Violet Dursley

10 Cranley Cl, Guildford, England.

With the flick of her wand, Hermione's otter appears before her. "Harry, are you free for a quick floo call this evening?"

With that, the otter disappears into thin air. Hermione practically holds her breath in suspense until a bright stag appears in her office.

"Yeah o'course Mione, everything okay? I'm free right now, actually."

Hermione throws herself onto the floor in front of her fireplace, tossing the green powder into the grate. "Potter Manor," she enunciates.

"Hey, Mione!" Harry smiles. Hermione can hear the echoes of the Potter children behind her dear friend as a very pregnant Ginny appears next to her husband.

"Hey you," the witch grins, playfully pushing Harry to the left so that she is front and center in the call.

"Harry, I have some rather exciting news," Hermione begins, not able to keep her discovery to herself a single moment longer.

"Hermione Jean Granger, are you pregnant already?" Ginny exclaims.

Hermione audibly laughs, "No Gin, I am certainly not."

"Pity, we could wallow in self-pity together," the witch whines dramatically, fanning herself with this week's edition of Witch Weekly.

"Harry, are you in touch with your cousin Dudley at all?" Hermione asks.

"Erm, not really," Harry begins. "Although I spoke with him a year or two ago, he's married with a daughter now."

"Did he tell you his daughter's name?" Hermione asks, her words morphing together in excitement.

"Erm..." Harry begins, staring off into the distance, his brow furrowed.

"Violet?" Hermione suggests hopefully.

Harry's eyes light up at this. "Yes!" he smiles.

"Well, Violet Dursley happens to be on my list of incoming muggleborn students," Hermione grins.

Harry's jaw falls open in shock, though he remains silent.

"I thought you might like to come to visit them with me," Hermione suggests. "This weekend?"

Harry nods, evidently still in shock.

Hermione's next few days are filled to the brim with what can only be described as absolute bliss. She's decided she rather enjoys being Draco's fiancée, and it seems that the blonde wizard may feel similarly based on his mood as of late.

Every morning, Hermione is awoken with an iced coffee prepared just the way she likes. She sleepily starts her day, taking her time emerging from the sanctuary of their bed while Draco bustles about. He lights candles and starts on breakfast, moving gracefully around her kitchen to the beat of whatever muggle CD he had chosen that morning. Hermione is more than happy to sit at the round oak table, coffee and book in hand, and observe the sight. Some mornings, she feels as if she's been transported back in time to Oxford, where their mornings would occur in a similar fashion.

Then, once they've indulged in whatever breakfast Draco had created—Belgian waffles, French toast, or an English fry-up—they set out with the sole goal of spending the day in each other's company. One day, they visit Flortescue's and order three scoops each: butterscotch, pumpkin, and rocky road for Draco and lemon, lavender honey, and strawberry mint for Hermione. Next, they visit Flourish and Blott's with a mission: purchase one book. Hermione selects the newest novel in a murder mystery series that Draco had started. Draco, however, demands privacy while he selects his volume. After an arduous hour of perusing the shelves, he selects a hot-off-the-press edition of *Hogwarts: A History*. He's quite happy with his selection, for he knows it is Hermione's favourite book. However, what makes this particular edition even better is the brand new chapters about the Battle of Hogwarts, and Hermione's name plastered across the pages.

The pair sit cross-legged on the couch across from one another that evening, their smiles giddy. On the count of three, they place their selected book in the lap of the other.

Hermione squeals. Her fingers rush to quickly, yet gently, open the fresh pages. "Turn to page 356," Draco smiles.

Without questioning why, Hermione happily flips through the pages, her eyes going wide when she finds her name. "It's me," she whispers under her breath.

"I can't even imagine how ecstatic eleven-year-old Hermione would be to know that her name is found amongst the pages of her favourite book," the wizard grins.

"Do you like yours?" Hermione asks suddenly, gesturing to the red cover in his lap.

"Of course I do," he smiles. "Though this is book fourteen, and I am only on the fifth, so it will be a while before I read this one."

"Speed up will you?" Hermione teases.

That weekend, Hermione meets Harry in Hogsmeade, just outside of the Three Broomsticks. "What's that?" she asks, her eyebrow raised toward a lumpy package tucked under his arm.

"I've made biscuits," Harry replies sheepishly. "Oatmeal Chocolate Chip, Dudley's favourite."

"Well, that's lovely Harry," Hermione smiles. She's loved watching her friend grow over the years, finding her friend to be perhaps one of the best fathers she knows. "Shall we?" she asks, extending her arm toward him.

With that, the pair spin through time and space, arriving at 10 Cranley Cl, Guildford, England.

“Er, what do we do?” Harry asks, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

“Just follow my lead,” Hermione smiles, setting off toward the bright blue door.

She knocks on the door and steps back with her shoulders straight, dusting invisible lint off of her robes.

Within a moment, the door swings open, revealing a large man standing in the frame. “Lo,” he smiles.

“Hello Mr. Dursley,” Hermione smiles, glancing at Harry.

“Hello Dudley,” Harry adds.

“Harry!” Dudley smiles. “What a surprise! Please, come in.”

Dudley steps aside, gesturing for the pair to enter his home. Harry finds himself rather surprised by the home, for it is nothing like the home his cousin had grown up in. Bookshelves line the walls, filled to the brim with books, picture frames, and trinkets. Plush comfortable furniture fills the space, a colourful carpet below their feet. A child’s paintings are proudly on display, depicting mundane objects, scenery, and animals.

“Tea?” Dudley asks, heading towards the kitchen at the back of the home.

“Please,” Harry and Hermione reply in unison.

Once Harry’s cousin is out of earshot, Hermione whispers to Harry. “This will be easier than the average visit, seeing as Dudley already knows about our world.”

Harry nods. “I hope, er, he’s more accepting than his parents ...”

Dudley re-enters the room, a tray with all the fixings for tea in hand. “So, what brings you around, Harry?” he smiles.

“Er, well,” Harry starts, stumbling over his words.

“We’re here about your daughter Violet, actually,” Hermione smiles kindly. She removes an envelope from her robes, addressed to the young girl in Headmistress McGonagall’s handwriting in green ink. “This envelope may look familiar to you...”

Dudley smiles, “I was waiting for one of these to arrive.”

“Really?” Harry asks suddenly.

“Violet is something else. I’ve known she was like you and Aunt Lily for years now.”

“So, she really is a witch?” Dudley asks.

“Yes, and she has a spot at Hogwarts this coming year, should you accept,” Hermione replies.

“Shall I fetch her?” Dudley asks excitedly.

“Of course,” Hermione nods.

A few moments later, Dudley returns with a timid little girl hiding behind him. Her hair is jet-black, and she wears thick-rimmed purple glasses. There are splashes of paint on her clothing and a few dots here and there on her face.

“Hello Violet,” Hermione smiles, lowering herself to the girl’s height. “I’m Professor Granger.”

“Lo,” the little girl replies, her voice almost a whisper.

“And I’m, er, your uncle Harry,” Harry adds, awkwardly lowering himself next to Hermione.

At this, the girl’s face lights up. “I know you!” she exclaims. “You’re a wizard, but that’s a secret. But, I suppose I can tell you since you’re you,” she begins to ramble.

Dudley chuckles under his breath, “I may have told her some stories about you, once I knew she was magic.”

“What stories?” Harry asks.

“Like when you set a snake on my daddy, or when you battled the bad guy, or when an elf was in Nanny’s home,” Violet smiles, clearly enamoured with the uncle she had just met.

After a lovely cup of tea, and the Muggleborn Integration program has been explained in depth, Hermione arranges for Harry to come to fetch the Dursleys in a few weeks’ time. Dudley can hardly contain his excitement about finally being able to set foot in the famed school, a place he’s wanted to visit far longer than he’d care to admit.

As Hermione and Draco walk through the streets of Hampstead, Draco tries to recall a time when he’s been as nervous as he is at that very moment. Sure, he’d once gotten the dark mark burned into his forearm and had to attempt to kill one of the most powerful wizards of all time. But, all of his experiences seem pale in comparison to meeting Hermione’s parents for the first time. He feels extremely guilty that he hadn’t met them prior to proposing to Hermione – the pureblood etiquette in the back of his mind screaming at him for not asking for her father’s blessing, despite the fact that he knows the witch would have hated if he did such a thing.

As Hermione points out various landmarks nearby her childhood home, Draco does his best to pay attention. “Draco?” he hears suddenly, his head snapping in her direction.

“Yes?” he replies.

“Remember, they want to like you,” the witch smiles. “You can explain quidditch to my dad. He’s always been curious about it, but I’ve never been able to really explain the concept.”

“Quidditch, okay, yes,” Draco nods, his mind spinning once more.

He hazily walks down the lane to the Grangers’ home, passing a church, a park, and a small library. However, as they approach the front step, Draco comes to a screeching halt. Hermione watches closely as the wizard stoops down, selects a singular rock, and taps his wand on his surface.

The rock is quickly replaced by a bouquet of flowers—tulips—Helen’s favourite.

“Good idea,” Hermione smiles, finally knocking on the front door.

Draco barely has a moment to take a deep breath before the door swings open, Helen Granger quickly pulling her daughter into a hug. “Hermione!” the woman exclaims.

Draco smiles to himself as he notices Hermione’s mother’s matching curls. Next to her, stands a man that Draco could have recognised anywhere. Now, Draco certainly hasn’t met this man before, that much is certain. No, Hermione is simply the spitting image of her father.

“Hello sir,” Draco smiles, extending his hand toward Richard Granger.

“Hello son,” the man grins, firmly shaking his hand in turn.

Draco’s mind short circuits momentarily – the term “son” is never used for someone other than one’s actual child in the wizarding world. Unsure of what to reply, he simply nods.

“These are for you, Mrs. Granger,” he smiles, handing the tulips to Helen.

“Oh! These are just gorgeous!” the woman exclaims, eagerly accepting the bouquet. “Come in, come in!” she smiles.

Draco feels a sense of calm set over him. The home is unmistakably *Hermione*.

Draco has been in a handful of muggle homes over the years. Some he finds to be rather *cold* – tiled walls and floors, with minimal furniture and no trace of people living there whatsoever. Other homes are the opposite, with far too much clutter, each room stuffed to the brim with *stuff*. The Granger’s home, however, is the perfect balance of clean and organised, yet *lived in*. Framed photos of the Granger’s lives line the walls, trips to various countries around the world, birthday parties, and Yule. It’s evident that Hermione’s parents have collected their decor from their travels, their rugs, pillows, and furniture are an eclectic mix of colours. Beautiful plants sit throughout the space, a pothos winding itself up the walls. But most notably, there are books *everywhere*. Every window ledge, mantel, and shelf showcases stacks of books.

“You have a lovely home,” Draco smiles, remembering his manners.

“Oh thank you!” Helen blushes. “Dinner is just about ready if you’d like to join us in the kitchen.”

Hermione happily guides Draco down a narrow hallway, emerging into a sunlit kitchen. Draco has seen many of Hermione’s memories of this very house, and he finds himself unable to wipe the smile off of his face. He believes it a deeply intimate matter to see one’s childhood home—the place where one learned to walk and talk. Where they experienced their first heartbreak and laughed for the first time.

He hopes that one day he and Hermione will have their own home, one where they might raise their future children. He hopes it’s a home like this, where his children will experience their *firsts*.

Draco waits for Hermione to gesture toward the seat he should occupy, not wanting to accidentally sit where he shouldn’t. He notices a lack of cutlery, only one spoon, fork, and knife.

“Wine?” Richard smiles, holding a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc.

“Yes please,” Draco nods. He’s worried he might be shaking as he glances down at his disillusioned engagement ring as the man pours him a glass.

“So, Draco, Hermione tells me you teach at the school with her,” Helen smiles.

“Yes, I teach potions,” he replies, appreciating that she was asking him questions. He’d been worried that he wouldn’t be able to scrounge up a single topic of conversation.

“Fascinating, and if I recall, that’s comparable to chemistry?” Helen asks, joining them at the round table.

“Yes, many of the principles of chemistry apply to potions as well. Various ingredients and procedures must be taken into account, as they all create different reactions and outcomes.”

“Draco went to University with me as well Mum, we collaborated on the research I was a part of,” Hermione prompts.

“Oh!” the woman exclaims, her brow furrowing. Draco watches as Helen attempts to piece things together, her memories of that time no doubt foggy at best.

“Yes, at Oxford,” Richard smiles, aiding his wife along.

“Yes, the dragon fever cure,” Hermione adds, hoping to jog her mother’s memory.

“Oh yes, how silly of me,” the woman replies, looking slightly upset.

“So you’ve known one another for a while now then,” Richard prompts, serving each person at the table a large scoop of creamy lemon shrimp pasta.

“Since Hogwarts, actually,” Draco replies.

Helen appears even more confused by this, her lips now pursed.

“Oh, and were you a Gryffindor as well then?” Richard asks, taking a sip of his wine.

“No, I was in Slytherin, sir.”

Helen’s head snaps up at this, her eyes wide. “Hermione, dear, what is it you told us about the Slytherins?”

“Well, as a child I certainly held certain beliefs about Slytherin house that I no longer do,” Hermione smiles carefully.

“Wasn’t that boy who bullied you a Slytherin?” Helen asks.

Draco feels his stomach drop. He’d been worried about this. Hermione had told him that her parents’ memories were spotty at best.

When they had first gotten their memories back, they struggled to remember anything of Hermione’s childhood. After extensive care from a mind healer, and listening to Hermione recount the various stories of her time at Hogwarts, they had a basic scaffolding of their daughter’s life. However, what they remember, is another problem altogether. It seems that Hermione’s mother is able to remember the negative things, far more than the positive things.

“He was yes, but he has since apologised for his behaviour on multiple occasions and all is forgiven,” Hermione replies simply.

“Well that’s good then,” Richard smiles.

“Draco also plays Quidditch, Dad,” Hermione adds, hoping to change the topic.

“Oh!” Richard exclaims. “And what position do you play?”

“I was a seeker, sir, at Hogwarts and Oxford.”

“Ah yes, the snitch!” Richard smiles.

Hermione’s eyes go wide at this.

“I’ve been reading the book you left here, Mione,” Richard explains. “Quidditch for Dummies.”

“Quidditch for Dummies?” Draco asks, his face lighting up.

“Yes, and all the diagrams move. It’s fascinating!”

Hermione avoids eye contact with her fiancée, not appreciating that he’d been reminded of her ownership of the publication.

“Now, I have some questions for you son,” Richard continues, launching into a surprisingly detailed conversation regarding the sport.

Draco happily obliges, finding himself far more relaxed now that the topic of conversation had landed on something he was familiar with.

Helen and Hermione make eye contact as the two men converse, sharing a silent, *knowing* look.

The rest of the main course passes swimmingly. All those present were quite satisfied with both the meal and conversation. It isn’t until dessert – a peach cobbler – that Hermione decides it’s time.

“Mum, Dad,” she smiles. “We do actually have some news.”

Helen and Richard look up in unison, both no doubt categorising the various sorts of news that their daughter could want to share with them.

“Oh?” Helen prompts.

With the wave of her wand, the disillusion lifts from their rings. Helen gasps, reaching for her daughter’s hand in a flash. “Oh, well this is just stunning!” she exclaims.

“You’re not upset, are you?” Hermione asks quickly. “I know that this is your first time meeting him, but things between us have been so fragile, and well, I wanted you to meet him sooner. I did, but...”

“Hermione,” Richard smiles, effectively silencing his daughter. “Our situation is unique, to say the least. We are not upset with you.”

“Of course, not my love,” Helen smiles, tears welling in her eyes. “When is the wedding?”

And with that, Hermione feels her heart rate slow once more. She hadn’t realised how much she needed to hear that reaction from her parents, but now that the words had been spoken, she feels a

weight lifted from her chest.

Draco explains his mother's wedding plan the best he can, extending a hand-written invitation into Helen's outstretched hand.

Hermione watches happily, her chest aflutter.

She'd dreamed of this exact dinner conversation for so long, she can hardly believe that it is actually happening before her very eyes.

She was to marry Draco Malfoy, and both her parents would be there to witness it.

Moonwort, Lightning, Gin, and Wine

Chapter Notes

Super excited about this chapter — I hope you enjoy! We are so close to being done this journey, I am so thankful for each and every one of you who have been here since the beginning xx

As always, I have so much love for my alpha/beta team: whits_end, callcalypso & likelyunfinished.

Hermione Jean Granger has always been the type of witch who would rather be almost comically over-prepared than not enough. Since her first year at Hogwarts, she'd started studying for her final examinations as soon as the winter term commenced. For her O.W.Ls, she'd begun studying the summer before her fifth year, following a rigorous colour-coded revisions schedule. However, no matter how much studying, revising, or reading she did, Hermione never felt truly and honestly *ready* for her examinations.

On the mornings of her exams, she would take her morning tea to-go, anxiously pacing around the grounds, muttering under her breath. In reality, she always knew that she would do well. She knew she would outperform 99% of her class, maintaining her spot at the top. But for some reason, the pesky feeling of anxiety never seemed to evaporate.

Her standards for herself have always been slightly outlandish, and she is well aware of this fact. She's always been a perfectionist, something she never does plan to change.

She supposes that it's because it's become such a key aspect of her identity over time. Who is Hermione Granger if not, well, the best?

As a child, she'd always been motivated, especially when it came to academics. Her teachers would praise her, complimenting her reading and writing abilities, and calling her "exceedingly bright." Hermione's heart would always feel full in these moments, the overwhelming sense of pride encompassing her entire mind. No matter what had been occurring up until that point, a compliment about her work would change her entire outlook on the day.

From that point onwards, she'd been chasing that feeling.

When she first arrived at Hogwarts, she'd worried. What if she was no longer the brightest? Had her talents only been due to the fact that she was a witch?

She'd read all of her textbooks from cover to cover in preparation, worried about the fact that she was eleven years behind the other witches and wizards who had been raised in magical households.

As it turns out, she was still exceptionally bright, a fact that had allowed her to relax ever so slightly. But this fact hadn't caused her to relent in terms of effort. No, she'd doubled down,

determined to maintain that spot.

Her standards were for herself and no one else. She did not expect all of those around her to strive for the same goals as she did. She would pester Harry and Ron, urging them to study, but she just wanted to ensure they got enough N.E.W.T.s to get half-decent jobs.

This mindset, however, was crippling in all the worst ways. Because even though Hermione knew she would succeed in comparison to her peers, that alone was never enough. No, Hermione needed to succeed in comparison to the standards she set for herself.

And so, the fact remains that although she has long completed her studies, Hermione is exceptionally well-prepared, especially for the trial that could change the lives of many.

As Hermione and Draco arrive at Potter Manor once more, she looks at him and smiles. One of those smiles that the wizard used to dream of being on the receiving end of. An unbridled, genuine smile.

Because, unlike all of her examinations, Hermione knows that her success with tonight's trial is a measure outside of herself. Either she succeeds or she doesn't, there is no grade.

As she verifies she has everything she needs in her beaded bag one last time, Hermione can't help but feel as if she will succeed. Everything just feels *right*. As if all the planets, fates, and stars had aligned just for this very evening.

The potion had once again been prepared with their modified recipe. Draco had expertly brewed the combination of Myrrh and Moonwort under Hermione's watchful eye. The quantity of Moonwort had been calculated down to the sixteenth decimal, the perfect amount to offset the potency of the aconite. By Hermione's calculations, Remus should be able to heal himself at a rate three times faster than the aconite will poison the lupus spirit.

She checks for her salt, including the Moonwort, Black Quicksilver, and Myrrh-infused counterparts. She verifies that the aconite flower remains intact, placed under a stasis charm by Neville earlier that day. Finally, she removes the Leyden jar from the beaded bag, a bolt of lightning crackling in its depths.

It had been a real challenge, capturing the lightning. Hermione had tinkered with the muggle contraption for many hours before she was confident that it would work. The glass jar had all sorts of enchantments on it, permitting the glass to be strong enough to withstand the intensity of the lightning. The metal foil and terminal had also been modified, dipped in a potion of Draco's own creation that essentially traps the essence of lightning, preserving all its original strength. Now, however, Hermione is quite proud of their joint creation. She had noted all of their attempts and reasonings in painstaking detail, hoping to publish them after their successful trial.

Satisfied, they step through the wards, arriving in the breathtaking garden of the Potter Manor. Summer flowers bloom around the perimeter, both magical and mundane varieties. A wooden veranda with vines interwoven through the structure stands strong over a small stone area, providing some much-needed shade during the summer months. An enchanted fountain flows into the pool that Harry had installed a few years prior, designed to resemble a pond. Lily pads float across the crystalline water, a few frogs happily snoozing on their surfaces.

Hermione smiles, admiring the home that Ginny and Harry had created for their family.

But, she quickly finds herself back on task, marching towards the back of the property. Draco follows dutifully behind, knowing that it is typically best to remain silent while the witch is in this sort of headspace.

They arrive in the small clearing, quickly locating Sirius, Remus, Cassie, Professor Bates, and Professor Pyrites.

The young witch had been adamant about joining her fathers in this trial, refusing to take no for an answer. She'd threatened to arrive at the Potter Manor a day early, tie herself to a tree and refuse to leave should they not allow her to come.

In the end, of course, they had agreed.

"Hey, Mione," Cassie smiles, taking a large bite of a pumpkin pastry.

"Cass, would you like to help me set up?" Hermione asks, already purifying the soil in the area where she will draw her runes.

Without uttering a single word, Cassie stands, carefully making her way toward her godmother.

"The rune needs to be drawn quickly, so when I ask you to pass me something, do so immediately."

Cassie nods, accepting Hermione's beaded bag.

"Plain salt," Hermione says, Cassie quickly obliging. Hermione draws the square formation with care, assuring that it is perfectly equal on all sides. She then draws two additional lines from the bottom, forming a fork-like formation.

"Moonwort-infused salt," Hermione instructs Cassie, now drawing a straight line down the middle of the rune.

"Black Quicksilver-infused salt," the witch orders, drawing a thin line that extends from the right side of the square. "Myrrh-infused," she mutters breathlessly, drawing a matching line.

"Aconite flower," the witch says quickly, watching as Cassie summons the plant with care. Hermione levitates the purple bloom to the spot where the shapes come to meet, casting various herbology enchantments to ensure that it is properly planted. The purple petals come to life, the moonlight causing them to almost glow.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione nods in Remus's direction. Wordlessly, he walks towards her, taking a seat in the centre of the salt formation.

"The potion," Hermione instructs, passing the brew to the very tired-looking man.

Hermione casts a tempus spell, checking the time.

Five minutes until the moon reaches its peak.

Five minutes until Remus transforms.

Or doesn't.

"Drink it when I give you your cue." She moves without hesitation, entering a trance.

First, she strikes a match and lights the formation, the exterior barrier beginning to emit a light ember. As the flames continue to build and grow, she takes a deep breath, watching as they approach the purple aconite flower. The poisonous bloom starts to sizzle, launching her into action.

She begins the first spell, chanting as she waves her wand.

“Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor.”

Remus’s pulse quickens the moment the words leave her lips, his entire body beginning to twitch. It’s as if the lupus spirit within him knows that something is awry.

Four minutes.

From behind him, Dr. Pyrites replicates her motions, chanting in unison.

“Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor.”

She waves her wand, tracing the vinewood in the lupine formation. Her brow grows moist with perspiration, and her jaw clenched.

“Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor,” the two alchemists continue to chant, moving around the formation, waving their wands – unblinking.

Remus’s body continues to contort, and Draco has no doubt in his mind that it’s the lupus spirit attempting to emerge.

Three minutes.

“Invoco te, magne lupe spiritus, ut me ex hac anima eruas, et iterum vagor,” she repeats, her voice becoming louder and more assured with each chant.

“INVOCO TE, MAGNE LUPE SPIRITUS, UT ME EX HAC ANIMA ERUAS, ET ITERUM VAGOR!”

Remus’s entire body trembles, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. He can feel his soul within his own body, his existence pulsating as his lupus spirit thrashes.

Two minutes.

“INVOCO TE, MAGNE LUPE SPIRITUS, UT ME EX HAC ANIMA ERUAS, ET ITERUM VAGOR!” the alchemists yell. Hermione blinks, attempting to see despite the tears blinding her.

Remus continues to spasm, his limbs moving of their own accord.

“Drink it, Remus!” Hermione shouts.

The man obliges, pouring all of the contents into his mouth.

Suddenly he stills.

Not a single muscle moves.

She notices his eyes glistening in the moonlight, their usually welcoming hue shifting to something sinister.

One minute.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione unscrews the lid of the Leyden jar. With her wand and an immense amount of willpower, she watches as Remus's face contorts.

"Dirige ad fontem, purga id quod est antiquissimum," she speaks clearly, the bolt of lightning escaping its jar and barreling toward Remus.

Suddenly, Remus's body is raised into the air, his arms spreading into the sky as his back arches. His head tilts back, his eyes facing the moon.

He yells, though it is not a sound of pain, but rather one of power.

All those present can hardly believe their eyes as something emerges from Remus. Some may believe it to be a ghost, others, raw energy.

But Hermione knows that as the translucent spirit leaves its host, Remus is no longer a wolf in any sense of the word.

He comes crashing toward the earth once more, a quick *Arresto Momentum* slowing his fall.

His eyes are wild, and as he breathes deeply, glancing at all of those present, he smiles.

At approximately 6:55 in the evening four short days before her wedding, Hermione is kidnapped.

However, it is a good sort of kidnapping, if such a thing exists.

Weeks prior, Hermione had explained to Ginny that she really didn't want much of a bridal shower. Perhaps a nice dinner with a few of her friends, but certainly nothing over the top.

Ginny had nodded nonchalantly, not putting up a fuss whatsoever.

In hindsight, Hermione should have found this unnerving, for Ginny Potter has never been one not to put up a fight. But, as it turns out, Ginny had already set plans in motion, collaborating with Pansy, Daphne, and Luna to plan a bridal shower worthy of the wizarding world's golden girl.

While Hermione is swept into a swivelling chair by a very determined Pansy Parkinson, a charmed brush ripping through her curls, a house elf appears, removing her trainers.

"Oh!" she exclaims.

"Thea will be painting Miss Granger's toes!" the small elf grins, vanishing Hermione's socks and setting to work on trimming the nails.

"Oh, you don't have to do that!" Hermione assures the small elf.

The elf looks up at the witch in horror, tears already beginning to well in her eyes. "Miss doesn't want Thea to paint her toes? Thea found such a pretty periwinkle just for Miss Granger," the elf sobs.

“Granger, please, let Thea paint your toes,” Pansy orders. “She’s been looking forward to this all week.”

“All of Pansy’s elves are paid, Mione, I already asked,” Ginny chuckles. The redheaded witch sits at an awkward angle on a large leather couch, her hand placed protectively over her swollen abdomen.

“Okay Thea, er, thank you,” Hermione smiles at the small elf. With that, the tears seem to evaporate from Thea’s eyes, and the elf happily sets to work, humming as she does.

“So Granger, I’ll be doing your hair and makeup for this evening,” Pansy grins. “Then Daphne picked out a gorgeous ensemble for you to wear.”

“I’ll be cleansing your aura!” Luna adds, her eyes looking nowhere in particular. The blonde witch sways to music no one else seems to hear, a grin spread across her face.

“Yeah, and Ginny is here to guilt you into having the bridal shower you deserve,” Ginny shouts, wincing as she shifts her weight slightly.

“Gin, I told you I didn’t want anything-” Hermione begins.

“We don’t want to hear it, Granger,” Pansy retorts, tugging on her hair much more aggressively than necessary.

As the witches prepare for their evening, Draco finds himself in a parallel though altogether different situation.

It hadn’t taken a kidnapping of any sort to convince the wizard to spend the evening with his friends, especially when Theo had promised they would meet up with the witches later in the evening.

Though he would never admit to it, Draco has found himself to be rather attached to his fiancée. However, he chooses not to question it, simply because he never thought he’d have the opportunity to grow attached to the witch he would marry.

Even the year prior, Draco had assumed that he would be entering a courtship that was tolerable at best, filled with pursed smiles and polite nods, certainly not the all-encompassing enamour he is currently experiencing.

So, he puts on his favourite muggle attire, a combination of clothing that he knows Hermione adores. Over the past few months, he had conducted various unofficial experiments – he is a man of logic, after all. On every date with Hermione, he’d worn a different ensemble of clothing, both muggle and magical. His witch had a habit of verbalising the pieces she was partial to, and in his favourite cases, she would drag her index finger across the fabric.

By now, after isolating variables and noting her reactions, he knows exactly which clothing the witch enjoys. His wardrobe is now composed of clothing that resembles her favourites, mostly because he has the hopes that she’ll drag her index finger across his clothing every day for the rest of time.

Tonight, he settles on a burgundy suit with a crisp white oxford. Satisfied, he steps into the floo, emerging into Theo's sitting room.

"Drakey!" the wizard shouts, sloshing single-malt whiskey all over his front.

Blaise sits with his ever-present smirk plastered on his face, his legs kicked up over the arm of the leather sofa.

Looking slightly uncomfortable, Harry and Neville sit on a smaller loveseat next to the fireplace. Harry bounces his knee as he glances around the room, while Neville remains almost comically still.

"Lads, are we ready for a night out celebrating our dearest Drakey?" Theo grins, balancing himself on the armrest a few inches away from Neville.

"Strippers should be here any minute, mate," Blaise drawls.

Draco's eyes blow wide. "Absolutely not." Visions of Hermione berating him for his activities flash through his mind, her hair aflame in a fury.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, Malfoy. I know you better than to order strippers on your behalf," the wizard smirks.

"Our first stop is the new Gin Distillery in Diagon. I booked us a private tasting room," Theo smiles.

The wizards apparate in unison, appearing in front of the Moondew Distillery. The old building had previously been an odd amalgamation of businesses off of the main drag of the alley. But now, as you approach its exterior, time seems to slow down. The weathered facade stands proudly, its bricks weathered and worn down to an earthy colour.

The wizards all pause and stare at the entrance in awe, its heavy wooden doors bearing intricate runic carvings. Theo is the first to move, carefully pushing open the doors, the other four wizards following quietly behind. The musty scent of aged wood and botanical essences wafts through the air, engulfing their senses in an aromatic embrace. The last remaining sunlight of the day streams through tall, narrow windows, casting soft, dappled shadows on the worn stone floor, giving the space an ethereal sort of feel.

"Wow," Neville mutters under his breath.

"Wow," Harry agrees, straining his neck in an attempt to take in his surroundings.

Inside, the vast entry hall is a sanctuary of copper and oak. Towering copper stills, burnished to a radiant glow, stand like sentinels, hinting at the alchemical magic they perform. The air hums with the gentle symphony of machinery, gears turning and cogs spinning in a synchronised dance, orchestrating the transformation of liquid to spirit.

The five usually rambunctious wizards move silently through the hall, each awe-struck by the magnificence of the space. Enormous oak barrels, standing in rows, line the walls, whispering tales of maturation and flavour development, their intoxicating aromas intermingling and infusing the space with a symphony of oak, vanilla, and spice.

Theo leads the group through a labyrinth of stills and barrels, steering them toward a narrow staircase that reveals dimly lit alcoves holding shelves of glass bottles. The bottles capture the light and refract it into a kaleidoscope of hues.

Draco immediately feels at peace in the establishment. He admires the fact that the distillery seems to be almost a testament to the artistry of distillation, where science and creativity intertwine. It reminds him of the art of potions, of course, and even more so, the combination of potions and alchemy.

One Week Prior, Professor Granger's Living Quarters

“Do you find it interesting that our chosen areas of study are interconnected and complementary, yet also so drastically different?” Hermione asks, tucked beneath the sheets.

“Can’t say I’ve ever really given it much thought, though I suppose you’re right,” Draco replies, placing his finger to mark the sentence he was in the midst of reading.

“I sort of like it, actually,” Hermione smiles. She tucks her hair behind her ear, causing Draco’s stomach to flutter ever so slightly. He knows that when Hermione pulls her hair out of her face, he is about to witness a sermon that rivals that of Professor Binns.

“Of course, potions and alchemy are similar, as they both involve transformational processes. They seek to manipulate substances and harness their properties to create desired effects. Whether it’s changing the properties of a liquid or seeking a spiritual transformation, both potions and alchemy aim to bring about a change.”

The witch pauses, her mind whirring.

“However, they differ substantially as well. Potions are more specific and focused in their application. They are often concocted for a particular purpose, such as healing, enhancing physical abilities, or inducing specific states of mind. Alchemy, on the other hand, has a broader scope that encompasses the exploration of matter, the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, and the quest for transmutation.”

Draco remains silent, knowing full well that the witch’s tirade is not yet complete.

“It reminds me of us, really,” she grins, turning to face him. “We’re very similar in a lot of ways, yet where I am more methodological, you’re more exploratory and experimental. It’s interesting, isn’t it, that we chose to study in the ways that we aren’t?”

Draco smiles, realising that as per usual, the witch is correct. “Perhaps my lifelong fascination with potions has merely been preparing me to navigate that mind of yours, Granger,” he drawls.

“And are you insinuating that you can successfully navigate my mind?” the witch giggles.

“I somehow convinced you to marry me, so I’d say yes,” he replies, deadpan.

After a tour by a young witch whom Blaise made sure to compliment no less than twelve times, the men settle in a lounge of sorts. They sip their glasses of individually distilled gin, each in a drunken stupor. Draco had opted for a mix of both citrus and spice, the flavour profile exactly to his liking.

He isn't sure how Theo had managed to plan such a perfect evening, but Draco finds himself in a fantastic mood.

"So what's next?" Draco asks eagerly.

"Now, we play poker while we wait for the witches," Blaise grins, spreading the chips and cards across the table.

Nestled in the historic streets of Edinburgh's Old Town, there stands an enchanting wine bar that exudes an aura of timeless elegance and rustic charm. Upon their arrival via portkey, there is no surprise that Pansy Parkinson would have chosen this old wine bar. The elegant stone façade beckons the witches inward, and as Ginny pushes open the heavy door, a gust of warm air infused with the inviting aromas of aged oak and rich red wines greets them. The interior unfolds before their eyes, revealing a cosy sanctuary adorned with exposed brick walls that exude a sense of antiquity. Soft, warm lighting casts gentle shadows, creating an intimate and romantic atmosphere.

Ginny and Luna gasp in unison as they approach the heart of the centuries-old wooden bar that spans the length of the room. It bears the marks of time, with faint imprints of wine spills and the delicate etchings of countless conversations that have taken place over the years. Behind the bar, rows upon rows of wine bottles stand tall, their labels whispering tales of distant vineyards and artisanal winemakers.

The witches are escorted to a private room at the back of the building, taking in a symphony of sounds—the gentle clinking of glasses, the hushed murmurs of patrons engaged in animated conversations, and the occasional burst of laughter that echoes through the space. The atmosphere is alive with a sense of conviviality, something that leaves Hermione with the feeling of fire in her veins.

An intimate wooden table greets them, adorned with flickering candles. Scattered, worn leather-bound wine lists are positioned in front of each chair. In the corner, a crackling fireplace emanates a warm glow, casting dancing shadows on the walls.

"Oh, Pansy, this is gorgeous," Hermione smiles, glancing around the space. "Thank you."

"Of course, Granger, we have to celebrate never having to hear of Draco's pining again, don't we Daph?" the witch laughs.

"Well, now it seems dear Theodore has replaced him in that role," Daphne giggles.

"Poor Neville doesn't know what's hit him," Ginny adds, slowly lowering herself into her leather chair. "They better have non-alcoholic options at this place or I'll fucking riot."

The witch's evening passes in a haze of delightful conversation and full-belly laughs that make Hermione's eyes water.

As the evening progresses, she finds herself entirely content and thankful. Her cheeks are rosy from the various glasses of wine she'd consumed, her hair no doubt growing in size with every moment that passes.

"Are you ready to see your beloved?" Pansy smirks, turning toward the witch.

“I suppose we could grace him with my presence,” Hermione grins.

Pansy’s flamingo patronus appears in the distillery’s lounge, winking in Theo’s direction. The wizard stands suddenly, instructing everyone to meet at the previously discussed location. “Drakey,” he grins, stretching his hand in the wizard’s direction.

With a sigh, Draco grabs ahold of Theo’s hand and is whisked away into the night.

The five witches and five wizards appear in unison within the leafy streets of Hampstead, Hermione’s childhood home standing before them. A quintessential Georgian townhouse, the three-story residence exudes an air of cosy elegance. The wrought-iron gate swings open in welcome, and Hermione feels tears prick at her eyes as they walk down the cobblestone path.

The comforting beauty of Hampstead comes alive in the secluded garden behind the house. A symphony of colours greets the eye as vibrant flowers bloom among the meandering pathway. She grins as she sees the rustic wrought-iron gazebo, entwined with climbing roses. Fairy lights have been strung throughout the garden, illuminating the setting of so many of her childhood memories in a warm glow.

“Surprise!” her parents shout, rushing towards their daughter and pulling her into a hug.

Hermione bursts into tears as she turns to smile in Pansy’s direction, shocked by the evening as a whole. It’s perfect really, and so quintessentially ... her.

As twilight fades into the embrace of the night, conversations flow, punctuated by bursts of laughter that resonate throughout the space. All of those present encircle the engaged couple, their faces alive with joy and anticipation. Champagne glasses clink, and couples sway to the rhythm of the music emerging from Hermione’s old record player. Throughout the night, snapshots of love and friendship are captured as Harry’s camera immortalises the moments of celebration. Neville spins Theo across the dance floor with delicate movements, the Slytherin grinning ear to ear. Ginny snores as she sleeps with her head on Harry’s shoulder, while Luna and Blaise move in a rather peculiar fashion across the garden, swaying in time to the music. Pansy and Daphne sit tucked away on a small metal bench beneath the gazebo, whispering to one another, their cheeks flushed.

And somewhere in the midst of it all, Draco and Hermione sneak away into the gardens in a fit of giggles, spinning around in a drunken embrace. As the night unfolds, they can’t help but grin as they witness the merging of two worlds into one.

“I give you my heart”

Chapter Notes

Some exciting news: I have officially finished writing the stars above us. Just this morning, I finished the final epilogue.

I ask for your patience as these final two chapters are edited by my beta team.

As always please follow my socials (TikTok, Twitter & Instagram) where I will be posting updates when it is officially complete @embersofapril ♥

I adore each and every one of you who have been following this fic. This story is so important to me, and I am so glad there's people who are enjoying it.

Without further ado, let's enjoy the wedding we've all been waiting for. Only two epilogues left now!

Beta love ♥ to whits_end, likelyunfinished and callcalypso.

As the golden sun bathes the rolling hills of the Italian countryside in a radiant glow, the picturesque Zabini Estate stands proudly. The summer breeze gently carries the scent of blooming flowers and the aroma of ripening grapes. The vineyard, a lush tapestry of emerald leaves, has embraced the estate with its twisting vines, creating an enchanting backdrop for the celebration of two souls intertwined.

“You look beautiful, Hermione,” Narcissa smiles, moving a singular curl to frame the witch's face. “I have something for you.”

Hermione turns to face her with a look of concern. The Malfoys had already paid for their entire honeymoon, a gift she felt exceptionally guilty about. She knows the Malfoys certainly are not concerned about the number of galleons in their vault, but she still struggles to comprehend the ways in which her in-laws are able to spend their money.

“I read about the muggle tradition: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,” the witch smiles. “I wanted to contribute your *something old* if you'd like it, of course.”

Silently nodding, Hermione watches in awe as Narcissa removes a set of pearl earrings from a small velvet pouch. Hermione accepts them with a smile, admiring the timeless elegance of the pieces. Perfectly round, the pearls seem to glow with a soft white hue that catches the light in the space surrounding her. Each pearl is set in gleaming gold, with intricate runes inscribed upon the surface.

As Hermione holds the earrings in her hands, feeling as if the weight of the history and tradition they carry seeps through her very skin, a calming sensation falls over her.

“I received these from my mother on my wedding day,” the witch smiles. “Seeing as you will be my daughter in a few hours' time, I thought it would be appropriate to pass them along to you.”

“Narcissa,” Hermione smiles, feeling tears form in the corner of her eyes. “Thank you. They are absolutely beautiful.”

Tossing all decorum into the abyss, Hermione throws herself into the witch's arms, wrapping her own tightly around the woman.

“Oh!” Narcissa exclaims. The witch hesitantly pulls Hermione into a hug, clearly shocked by the gesture. It takes a second or two, but eventually, she allows herself to sink into the embrace.

“I am so happy for you and Draco,” she whispers as she pulls away. She fusses with Hermione's hair once more, no doubt in an attempt to distract herself from the emotions that keep sneaking up on her.

“I'll fetch your mother,” she smiles.

Helen Granger had always imagined her daughter's wedding day. Of course, she was never one to force the idea of marriage upon her daughter, for she is a firm believer that women do not need to marry at all, should they wish not to.

But, as she catches sight of her daughter in her wedding gown for the first time, she realises that her imagination has paled in comparison to what reality has to offer. Her breath catches as Hermione turns to face her mother, a radiant glow surrounding her as she makes her way through the space. “You are a vision, my love,” Helen smiles, admiring the delicate lace and beading that shimmered in the soft light.

She takes a deep breath and approaches her daughter, taking in every detail of the gown, carefully smoothing any imperfections. Hermione had planned to cast various charms on the gown before the ceremony but finds she prefers it this way, in its original form.

“Your father is going to cry,” Helen smiles.

“He cries when he watches children's films, that's hardly a surprise,” Hermione laughs.

“Yes, well, I suppose we can expect a full-on sob then, can't we?”

The last to visit Hermione before the ceremony begins is none other than a very pregnant Ginny Weasley.

“Oh Merlin, Mione, look at you!” the witch exclaims, hastening towards Hermione at a frightening pace. “Malfoy might pass away,” she laughs.

“I certainly hope not, our honeymoon is non-refundable,” Hermione replies, smoothing her gown for what feels like the one-hundredth time in the past hour.

“I'd come with you, don't worry,” Ginny smiles, taking a seat on the leather chaise. “I can't believe I'm eight months pregnant for your wedding,” she groans, leaning back and fanning herself with her hand.

“Yes well, I’m excited for there to be another little Potter in this world,” Hermione smiles.

“Speaking of, Lily is taking her role as flower girl very seriously,” Ginny laughs. “She’s rehearsed at least fourteen times in the past week.”

“Merlin, I love that little witch,” Hermione grins.

“How are you feeling?” Ginny asks, her tone turning serious.

“Surprisingly, I’m not nervous in the slightest,” Hermione smiles, laying a delicate finger on one of her pearls. “It feels right, easy even, as if I’m exactly where I’m meant to be.”

“Good,” Ginny smiles in return. “Because *you*, more than anyone, deserve *easy*, Mione.”

Draco stands beneath a fluttering veranda, attempting to steady his heart rate from the alarming pace it has taken on over the past twenty-four hours.

He knows that as far as progress goes, he’s made it to the end of the line. His witch had agreed to marry him, and as far as he knows, is readying herself to do just that at this very moment.

But .

But, of course, his worries sneak up on him. What if she suddenly realises that she doesn’t want to marry him? What if she realises that she’s much too good for him and that marrying him would be the worst mistake of her life? His mind continues to spin, whisking his common thinking and critical reasoning away with it.

“Mate,” he hears, causing him to whip towards the source of the voice.

“Theo,” he breathes, holding his side, hunched over against a stone wall.

“You okay, mate?” Theo asks, bringing a reassuring hand onto Draco’s shoulder.

“Fine just worried,” Draco replies, his words punctuated by heaving breaths.

“Don’t tell me you’re worried about Granger suddenly not wanting to marry you,” Theo chuckles.

“You’re one of the smartest people I know, Drakey—well, besides your lovely bride-to-be—but sometimes you are concerningly thick.”

Draco frowns in his friend's direction.

“That witch is absolutely and unequivocally in love with you, Draco. Before you proposed, she was pestering me every day, demanding to know if and when you were planning on doing it.”

Draco’s heart skips a beat. “She was?”

“Yes, now stand up, get your blonde head out of your arse and follow me,” Theo grins, giving him a rather aggressive pat on the back. “We’re about to begin.”

The ceremony unfolds in a flawlessly manicured garden, featuring vibrant bursts of colour. Roses, in various hues of blush and crimson, cascade down wrought-iron arches, entwining with delicate

jasmine and lavender. The aisle, strewn with petals of white and pale pink, leads towards an altar framed by towering cypress trees, their slender forms reaching skyward. Now much calmer than he had been a few moments prior, Draco stands tall beneath the cypress trees, anxiously looking toward the other end of the aisle.

The guests are all gathered in anticipation, witches and wizards from all walks of life interacting in hushed whispers as a gentle breeze rustles through the trees.

As the time for the ceremony to begin approaches, all those present take their seats. Some guests shield their eyes from the afternoon sun, their eyes squinting as they stare in the direction that Hermione would soon emerge.

Soft notes of music start to drift through the air, the tune somehow familiar yet unfamiliar to most of the guests.

Not a moment later, Hermione appears at the end of the aisle, her veil framing her face and reflecting the sunlight around her. Draco feels his breath catch, thankful that his mother had chosen this exact time for the ceremony. The sunlight catches the shimmering golden threads and intricate lace, casting a honeyed glow upon her, causing Draco to wonder if perhaps this is some sort of blessing of their union from Morgana herself.

She slowly walks down the aisle, her gown billowing softly in the warm breeze. The guests rise to their feet, their eyes fixed on the figure before them. Draco, standing tall in tailored wizard robes, waits with anticipation and awe. He feels his hands shake, but instead of the dreadful feeling that is usually associated with this occurrence, he feels only light.

After what feels like a millennium to Draco, Hermione finally arrives before him. She looks up at him with a cheeky sort of grin, scrunching up her nose at the sight of her fiancée. Their eyes lock, and in that moment, both Draco and Hermione smile — full, toothy grins that are not poised in the slightest.

In the singular moment that occurs before the vows commence, Hermione swears she is transported to an alternate reality. It's as if she's watching their relationship back on a film reel, like a compilation set to a sappy love song in one of her favourite romantic comedy movies. Skating across the frozen pond, bickering in the alchemy lab, smiling down at their lattes at the café. The Yule ball, their trip to Positano, and all of their memories fill her with an incommunicable sense of peace.

Because it's their story, one that only they have experienced. The moments they've spent with one another are like secrets between them, whispered in the dead of the night.

So, as the warlock begins to speak, Hermione finds herself grinning. Because as of today, a new lifetime begins for the pair, one they will face together.

Beneath an azure sky of cotton candy clouds, Draco begins to speak. "Hermione, from the first moment our paths intertwined, you challenged my perceptions and shattered the prejudices that once clouded my heart. You are the light that illuminates the darkest corners of my soul. Today, in front of our loved ones, I vow to cherish and nurture the connection we share."

The soft rustling of grape leaves creates a gentle symphony as if nature itself is celebrating this union. Hermione feels her breath catch, because his words feel like honey in her morning tea,

warming the tips of her fingers and spreading throughout her entire body.

“I promise to be your unwavering partner, supporting you in all your endeavours, and celebrating your triumphs as my own. Together, we will face the challenges that life presents. With you by my side, I know that no obstacle is insurmountable. I pledge to listen to your thoughts and dreams, to honour your intellect and fiery spirit. I promise to be a pillar of unwavering support, encouraging you to pursue your passions. I will be your rock, offering solace in times of sorrow and a warm embrace in moments of joy.”

Various attendees wipe singular tears from their eyes while Sirius removes his embroidered handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the stream of tears from his cheeks.

“With each passing day, my love for you deepens and grows. I vow to love you fiercely and unconditionally, for all the days of my life. In your presence, I find solace and a sense of belonging that I have never known before. With you, I am my truest self, and I promise to always see and love every aspect of that beautiful mind of yours. As we embark on this journey together, I promise to create a sanctuary of love and understanding, where we can both thrive and grow. I will always strive to be your equal, your confidant, and your best friend.”

Hermione feels her lip quiver, signalling the tears that will no doubt start to form, causing her irises to gleam.

“Today, I stand here, with your hand in mine, and I declare my love to you, Hermione Granger. I promise to be your partner in all things, to love you unconditionally, and to cherish the beautiful life we will build together. With you, my heart has found its home.”

Narcissa allows the tears to stream down her face, not caring in the slightest that it may smear her makeup, or be *improper*. All those years ago, she'd been saddened by many things during Voldemort's reign, that much is certain. However, one thing that disturbed her the most was that her son, if Voldemort had succeeded, would never be able to experience *love*.

Narcissa is a firm believer that it is love that unites us all, that it is love that is interwoven into the very fabric of our existence, guiding us through our lives. And now, as she watches her son declare his love for the only witch he's ever had eyes for, she feels something in herself settle. It was an ever-present ache she'd become accustomed to over the years, but knowing that her son is happy seems to be the only cure she needed.

Draco releases a long-winded breath, smiling at Hermione as she begins to speak.

“Draco, my love, as I stand before you today, I am filled with profound gratitude for the path that has brought us here. From the moment our lives intersected, a spark ignited within me—a spark that has grown into an unbreakable bond. I vow to love you with every fibre of my being, to embrace the beautiful complexities that make you who you are. You have shown me a love that transcends the boundaries of our past, and I promise to honour and cherish that love for all eternity. With you, I have found a love that is both tender and fierce, gentle and passionate. In your presence, I find solace and strength, and I promise to cherish and support the man you are and the man you aspire to be. With you, I feel seen, understood, and loved beyond measure.”

From just behind Draco, Theo starts to sob, choking back tears at the witch's proclamation.

“I promise to stand by your side as your equal, supporting and uplifting you in all that you do. Together, we will weather the storms of life, hand in hand. Together, we will create a safe haven, a

sanctuary where we can both grow and thrive. I pledge to celebrate your victories as my own and to provide solace in times of sorrow. Your dreams will become my dreams, and I will do everything in my power to help you achieve them. With you, Draco, I am inspired to reach for the stars, and I promise to inspire you in return.”

Cassie and Caitlyn entwine their hands together at this, taking a brief moment to smile in each other’s direction.

“With you, Draco, I have discovered a love that transcends boundaries and expectations—a love that has the power to heal and transform. I vow to love you unconditionally, to be your partner, your confidante, and your best friend. Together, we will create a life filled with laughter, passion, and unwavering devotion.”

Draco feels his breath catch, waiting for the last words to be spoken.

“Today, I take your hand, Draco Malfoy, and I give you my heart. With every beat, it sings your name.”

Draco wishes desperately that he had access to a time-turner at that moment, simply so that he could go back in time and show this memory to his younger self, proof that there is light in the seemingly endless tunnel.

A hushed silence falls over the garden as the warlock speaks, each syllable seeming to reverberate through the air. Time stands still as their eyes lock, their souls and magical cores reaching out to one another, finally connected as one after all this time. The world around them fades into a blur as they lean toward one another, their hearts pounding in unison.

Their lips meet in a moment that feels somehow both tender and electrifying – like a pepper-up potion and calming drought all in one.

The room erupts with applause and joyous cheers, but at that moment, both Draco and Hermione are completely encapsulated in their own world. With their eyes still closed, they stand in their embrace, basking in the warmth of their union and the overwhelming love surrounding them. In that instant, the world seems brighter, as if this union had transported them to a world of technicolour.

“We did it,” Hermione grins, wrapping her pinky around her husband’s.

“Astute observation, Golden Girl,” Draco winks, placing a kiss on her forehead.

The reception unfolds in a courtyard adorned with rustic wooden tables draped in flowing white linens. Centrepieces of wildflowers, sun-kissed daisies, and clusters of plump grapes are found on each table. Crystal wine glasses shimmer in the sunlight, inviting guests to indulge in the exquisite wines produced by the same vines surrounding them.

The clinking of glasses and laughter fill the air as the guests enjoy a feast featuring a delectable array of Italian delicacies. Fragrant basil, ripe tomatoes, and creamy mozzarella fill platters of Caprese salad. The Zabini house elves truly outdid themselves with the plates of handmade pasta that are drenched in rich, velvety sauces, with succulent cuts of grilled meats and fresh seafood.

As the evening unfolds, the fading sun transforms the sky into a tapestry of fiery hues. Soft lanterns hang from the branches above, casting a warm glow upon the celebration. The notes of live music carry through the breeze.

Caitlyn and Cassie dance to the music in a fashion that many of the pureblood witches in attendance consider to be far too modern, but neither witch seems to care in the slightest. Remus sits at a table with Harry, Ginny, Dean, Seamus, and Ron. He happily engages in conversation while stealing the occasional glance in Sirius's direction, having to hold back a laugh.

Sirius sweeps Professor McGonagall around the dance floor in a traditional waltz, spinning and dipping her in time with the music. The elderly witch grins, finding this celebration with so many of her past students to be an excellent way to celebrate her retirement – one she had announced only the week prior.

Hermione spins around the dancefloor with her father as they attempt to replicate a complex routine they had contrived during Hermione's childhood. Narcissa and Draco sway silently to the music, knowing that no words are needed to express their current sentiments.

Somewhere amongst the vines, Theo can be found with a certain herbology professor in a rather heated encounter.

Amidst the merriment, a sense of timelessness prevails. It's as if the winery, the vineyards, and the love that permeates the air had conspired to create a moment frozen in eternity.

Hours later, guests, their faces aglow with excitement, gaze upward.

Fireworks paint the sky with cascades of colour, showering the winery and its surroundings with mesmerising sparks. Glittering golden trails spin through the sky, intertwining with emerald greens and ruby reds. Depictions of both Draco and Hermione are alight in the sky, a surprise touch by Weasley Wizarding Wheezes.

As the fiery display reached its crescendo, the bride and groom, their hearts soaring, steal a moment to themselves. Hand in hand, they stand on a terrace overlooking the vineyard, their eyes reflecting the kaleidoscope of colours above.

"I love you, Draco Malfoy," Hermione whispers.

"I love you, Hermione Granger," Draco grins, pulling the witch flush against him. He kisses on the top of her head, breathing in the comforting scent of strawberries and honey – a scent he is ecstatic to bask in for the rest of his days.

And so, in the Italian countryside, amidst the rolling Zabini vineyards, the wedding ends with a shower of light and wonder. Surrounded by the beauty of nature and the warmth of their loved ones, they stare at one another in silence, for no words are needed to express the feelings they are both experiencing.

One Month Later

Hermione and Draco appear in the atrium of the English Ministry for Magic, their portkey (a can of beans) clattering onto the floor beside them.

Witches and wizards bustle about, rushing from one destination to the next.

Hermione casts a tempus charm, gasping at the sight.

“We’re going to be late!” she squeals, pulling her husband towards the floo.

“Hogsmeade!” she shouts, transporting them to the floo inside of the bustling Three Broomsticks.

The couple had had a glorious honeymoon exploring South America. It had been a trip of a lifetime for both of the scholars, the continent rich with knowledge both ancient and new. Beginning in Rio de Janeiro, the pair basked in the sun on the iconic Copacabana beach, trying every dish they could find. They then travelled to Argentina and experienced the awe-inspiring Iguazu Falls before savouring world-renowned steaks in Buenos Aires. Next, they ventured to Peru and witnessed the ancient wonder of Machu Picchu, nestled amidst misty mountains. A site of utmost importance in the field of alchemy, Draco practically had to drag Hermione away.

They then explored Bolivia, traversing the otherworldly Salar de Uyuni salt flats before continuing to Chile's Atacama Desert to take in the lunar-like terrain and glistening salt lakes. They then concluded their journey in Ecuador, visiting the mystical Galapagos Islands for snorkelling alongside sea turtles.

By the time they arrived at the Ministry, they were somehow both exhausted and relaxed. It had been a glorious time, but now, it was time to get back into the swing of things.

However, neither Draco nor Hermione dreaded returning to their existence back home, for they are rather fond of the lives they lead.

The pair hasten from the pub to the castle, arriving in the staff room with not a moment to spare.

“Ah, there’s our newlyweds,” Remus smiles.

Without further ado, the meeting commences, Hermione’s first since her appointment as Deputy Headmistress.

It was upon Minerva’s retirement that Remus became Headmaster, a role that Hermione believes he was born for. As such, the Deputy position was vacant, and the staff unanimously decided that there would be no one more suited to the role than Hermione.

The following day is September 1st, and Hermione can hardly wait. She’d been upset to miss the Muggleborns' first week at the school, but with only two months on the scholarly calendar available to them, their honeymoon had taken precedence. It had been a difficult decision, but Hermione was proud of herself for her newfound ability to delegate and trust others to carry out the tasks she would typically complete herself, and based on Neville’s reports, everything had gone swimmingly.

The Potter Manor

The next stop on the pair's very busy agenda that day is a stop at the Potter Manor to meet her new goddaughter.

"Mione!" Ginny shouts, pulling her friend into a tight hug. "I cannot wait to hear about your trip."

"Draco," she nods with a wink.

"Hi, Mione! Hi, Malfoy," Harry grins as they approach the kitchen. Hermione notices quite quickly that the wizard has his newborn wrapped around his torso with a white piece of soft fabric.

"Hand her over, boy wonder," Ginny grins, gesturing towards the baby.

The witch swiftly hands the baby to Hermione, allowing the little baby to stare up at her.

"This, Hermione, is *Hermione*," Harry whispers.

Hermione's head whips up at this declaration. "Hermione?" she clarifies, looking back down at the girl.

"We're thinking Mia for short, just to avoid confusion when discussing you, but yes. This is mini Mione," Ginny grins.

Hermione bursts into tears, holding the baby against her chest. "She's perfect," she nods.

Draco feels his breath catch at the sight of his wife holding a baby, swaying back and forth. He hopes that perhaps soon, they would have a child of their own.

The evening's dinner is a splendid occasion, the Potter children joining them happily to indulge in their father's newest cooking escapade: chicken tikka masala.

After dinner, the adults adjourn to their usual location, the garden. The wizards walk through the cobbled paths, discussing the quidditch matches that Draco had missed while abroad.

Once out of earshot of the witches, Draco turns to Harry with a small smile. "I bought us a home."

"Me and you?" Harry asks, tilting his head ever so slightly to the side.

"No, you daft dimbo, Hermione and I," Draco clarifies, scrunching his nose up as he wonders how on earth he managed to become acquainted with the boy wonder.

"Oh! Well, that's lovely, Malfoy," Harry smiles.

"It's a small cottage in Oxford. I've had it fixed up while we were away. I'm taking her there tonight," the wizard grins, his body practically shaking in excitement.

"So, Mione, spill," Ginny grins, taking a long sip of Zinfandel.

"Spill *what*, Ginevra?" Hermione winks.

“How many countries did you and Malfoy do it in, then?”

“How many did we visit?” Hermione asks, pretending to tally up the countries they visited.

“Five,” Ginny supplies eagerly.

“Then five,” Hermione laughs, hiding her smile behind her mug of tea.

“I’ll drink to *that* !” the witch cheers, attempting to thrust the bottle of wine toward Hermione. The witch’s cheeks are flushed crimson red, causing her hair to appear even more fiery than normal.

Hermione, however, does not reach out to accept.

“Mione?” Ginny asks, aghast.

“I, er, feel like it’s best to not drink,” the witch answers simply.

“Are you ...?”

“I don’t know,” Hermione whispers.

Without a word, Ginny drags her friend inside, forcing her to take a seat on the kitchen counter.

“Gin...” Hermione starts.

“Do you want to know?”

Hermione only nods.

“*Utero, matre, puero,*” Ginny whispers, her wand pointed at Hermione’s abdomen.

A bright light shines just above her navel, a small orb of light spinning before them.

“Mione,” Ginny gasps.

Hermione smiles, staring at the orb of light with a look of absolute adoration.

Just outside of the Potters’ kitchen, Draco stands with his hand just grazing the brass doorknob. He’d been just about to step inside with the intent of whisking his witch away to their new home.

But then, he’d seen it.

The orb of light.

He bursts through the door, rushing toward his wife.

“You beautiful, breathtaking witch,” he breathes, pulling her off of the counter and wrapping her legs around his torso.

“You’re going to be a dad,” Hermione giggles, placing an abundance of kisses across his face.

“And you’re going to be a mum,” Draco smiles.

His heart aches at the thought. The thought of him and his witch tucked beneath their duvet, a small child giggling between them. The thought of a sun-filled kitchen, three matching cups of hot cocoa on an old wooden table. The thought of a blooming garden, a small child running through the field, chasing a butterfly.

Draco's body feels still, like a rock smoothed by the passage of time, the flow of a river gliding against its surface. He feels as if everything he has experienced washes over him, reminding him of the path he'd taken to get here.

And at that moment, Draco realises that his earlier pondering regarding Theseus's paradox had been incorrect, or rather incomplete. While existing in Hermione's orbit had certainly transformed him completely, he was not entirely unrecognisable from the boy he had once been. Somehow, Draco is both the man he is now and the boy he had once been. Over time, he changed gently and unknowingly. He was changed by adversity, yes, but also through loving and being loved.

The stars arranged themselves quietly in the sky, both shining and burning, forming the constellations we look for today. The universe gave us the stars, but it was we who chose to find meaning and purpose in the way they arranged themselves. Draco found himself over time. He sought his purpose, his reason for existing in this life. But perhaps even more importantly, he allowed those he loves to assign him meaning and purpose, to fit him into their existences for the rest of time into a constellation of their own.

And Draco finds he is quite content to exist in his constellation for eternity because he knows this is exactly where he is meant to be.

Eleven Years Later

Chapter Notes

Wow, I cannot believe we made it to the final chapter of the stars above us. This was a double upload so make sure you read chapter 39 first!

After reading hundreds of fanfictions over the past few years, I found myself starting to dream about this fic. At first, I was going to write a fic that took place in oxford, which became the flashbacks and history of TSAU. Then I wanted to write a hogwarts professors fic (my favourite trope) about the international confederation of wizards championship. In the end, I somehow managed to combine them all into this second-chance romance about our two favourite idiots in love.

I started writing this fic while I was in a very dark place mentally, and it remained a constant source of light for me as I worked my way towards healing and being kinder to myself. Thank you for sharing this journey with me, and allowing me to express some of my feelings through this story.

I've always loved writing, but this was really the first time I put my writing out there, so the positive reception this story has received was overwhelming. I am so thankful for each and every one of you who have followed along and supported me, it's meant the world to me.

I also wanted to take a minute to thank my beta team, without whom this story simply would not exist. There were multiple instances where I was ready to throw in the towel and abandon this fic due to personal reasons, but my beta team's support kept me going.

Kyra (likelyunfinished) - my emotional support and the most lovely human. Kyra was always there for me to vent to, and was so incredibly supportive throughout this process. I would send her paragraphs of writing and ideas, and she would provide feedback that was both brutally honest and kind. Kyra's own writing was also a source of inspiration for me throughout this process, and for that I am incredibly thankful. Kyra's reaction comments on my google docs made me so excited to finish chapters, so you can thank her that I got any writing done at all.

Whit (whits_end) - my beta editor extraordinaire. Whit is the reason this fic makes any sense at all to be honest. She would catch my canadian spellings, my comma splices, and my overuse of my favourite words. She helped me plan the logistics of the fic, and the more plot-driven aspects where I would often be at a loss for words.

Cassia (calcalypso) - cassia would hop on calls that were hours long with me so I could word vomit my ideas and work through plotting this fic. Cass is SO good at world building, and making my mess of ideas make sense. I am so thankful for her support and comments on my docs throughout this process.

So, without further ado, please enjoy the last and final chapter of the stars above us.

A short walk from the University of Oxford, nestled amidst the picturesque town, is a charming cottage. As you approach the home along a winding stone pathway, the chirping of birds fills the air, intermingling with the distant echoes of students bustling through the streets of the ancient town.

This cottage's honey-hued stone facade, highlighted with climbing roses and ivy, has a magical sort of feel, one that causes the average passerby to stop and simply appreciate the home from time to time.

Inside, the home can only be described as *cosy*. Honey-coloured wooden beams traverse the ceilings while oak bookshelves line the walls, laden with an extensive collection of novels, textbooks, and various other publications. The aroma of aged parchment and polished wood lingers in the air, while soft beams of sunlight filter through the windows, casting dancing patterns of light upon the space.

The kitchen is a favourite space of the inhabitants. Sunlight streams through the stained glass windows, illuminating the farmhouse table with speckled rainbows. There, a bouquet of freshly picked wildflowers sits in a dainty vase, magically charmed to remain in blossom for months at a time. Copper pots and pans gleam from their hooks, and the air is infused with the scent of freshly brewed tea. Sheet curtains dance in the summer breeze, framing picturesque views of Oxford's dreaming spires.

There, in this kitchen, sits a small girl, currently enraptured by the book before her.

"Mummy," she says suddenly, glancing up to look at her mother. The two share an almost alarming resemblance, something that brings the young girl much joy. However, their matching curly hair and eyes the shade of molten honey are not where the similarities end. Behind the young girl's eyes lies a spark, a glimmer of determination that illuminates her every thought and action, something her father was overjoyed she inherited from her mother.

Her nose, however, is that of her father's, as well as her witty sense of humour and interest in flying on her miniature broom.

"Yes, my love," the mother smiles, looking up from her book.

"When will Auntie Cassie be here?" the small girl asks.

"Any moment now, why don't you go and fetch your father from the garden so he can get cleaned up before they arrive?" the mother smiles.

"Okay!" the girl grins, making a dash for the garden.

The garden is in full bloom, an oasis that had been created by the girl's father. The plants range from roses and lavender to medicinal plants intended for various potions. The girl weaves her way through the meandering path, passing a small pond that glimmers in the afternoon sunlight.

"Daddy!" the girl sings, poking her head around the final corner of the garden.

"Iris," the man grins, beckoning her forward. "Would you like to pick a bouquet for Cassie and Caitlyn?"

The girl eagerly nods, picking various blooms she thinks her godmothers might like. “Mummy wants you to come inside and get cleaned up before they arrive,” she adds, a swotty tone escaping her tiny frame.

The man only smiles, happily accepting the flowers his daughter chooses and assembling them into a bouquet.

The pair make their way back to the cottage; the man pausing only momentarily to cast a charm on himself to rid his clothing of any dirt. By now, he knows better than to trek it into the home.

“Iris!” Hermione shouts, “Is your trunk all packed? We have to leave quite early tomorrow, and I know you will likely have a late night this evening.”

“Yes, *Headmistress*,” the girl giggles. “And I already checked that I have everything. Are you sure I can only bring five of my books?”

“Yes, you can exchange them when you come home for Yule,” Draco chuckles. “Not to mention your mother assured that there is an extensive collection of muggle literature now residing in the Hogwarts Library.”

Not a moment later, there is a clatter that can be heard from the living room.

“HELLLLOOOOOOOO,” sings a man’s voice.

“Moony!” Iris shouts, running to greet her godmothers and godfathers.

“What am I, an old dog?” Sirius chuckles, rucking a grey lock of hair behind his ear.

“Yes, a *stinky* old dog,” Iris replies with a devilish grin.

Sirius gasps dramatically, placing a hand over his heart. “You wound me, Iris,” he fakes sobs.

“Hello, Moony,” the girl smiles, hugging her godfather around his torso.

“Hello my dear,” the wizard smiles, ruffling the girl’s hair.

“I can’t believe I have to start calling you, Dad, and Mum *Professor* tomorrow,” the girl whines.

“Professor Moony,” she laughs.

“Professor Lupin, Miss Iris,” the wizard laughs.

“Where are Cassie and Caitlyn?” Iris asks with a frown, peering into the fireplace behind the two wizards.

“We were picking up a gift for you,” Cassie smiles, stepping out of the fireplace.

“A gift!” the girl shouts.

Caitlyn steps through the floo next, a small cat carrier in hand. “A gift indeed. Iris, meet your new familiar,” she grins, opening the zipper to reveal a tiny grey tabby.

Iris gasps, reaching out to take the cat into her arms. “He’s perfect,” she sobs.

The cat nuzzles into Iris’s neck before relaxing, clearly content with his new companion.

“What will you name him Iris?” Hermione asks.

“Theo,” the witch grins. Both her parents chuckle to themselves, more than aware of the affection the young girl carries for her uncle.

“I’m sure Uncle Theo will be thrilled,” Draco smiles.

That night, over a dinner of fresh strawberry spinach salad and spaghetti bolognese in the garden, Iris finds herself feeling a peculiar combination of emotions that she can’t remember ever feeling prior to this very moment.

“Are you ok, love?” Cassie whispers, glancing down at the young witch.

“I just can’t believe that I’m leaving tomorrow,” the girl whispers back, beginning to glance around at the loved ones currently dining with her.

“You’ll be home for Yule,” Cassie smiles. “Besides, both your parents will be there with you, and Uncle Moony, and Uncle Neville.”

“But I’m going to miss you, and Auntie Caitlyn, and Uncle Theo, and Auntie Ginny and Uncle Harry,” the girl replies, listing off her favourite humans, lowering a finger as a tally for each one.

“Do you want to know a secret?” Cassie grins.

The small witch nods eagerly.

“I’ll be at Hogwarts too, starting tomorrow,” Cassie whispers. “As the school’s mind healer, working to help all the students process their emotions and feelings, fears and traumas.”

After the completion of her mastery in mind healing at Harvard University, Cassie has worked for the past few years at St. Mungos in the Janet Thickey Ward. However, after much deliberation, she’d thought that perhaps she might prefer to work with children. All it had taken was a simple mention of her idea for Hogwarts to have a mind healer on staff for both the Headmaster and Deputy Headmistress to sign off on their letter of approval to the board of governors.

Iris squeals rather loudly, causing all of those present to look up in shock.

“I may have let it slip that I’ll be at Hogwarts this year,” Cassie chuckles.

“Cassandra! It was meant to be a surprise!” Hermione exclaims, tossing a stray strawberry at her goddaughter’s head.

“Well, it still is. She was just surprised earlier than originally intended!” Cassie pleads.

“Good thing there’s still the other secret,” Sirius mumbles absent-mindedly.

“What secret?” Iris demands, her head whipping to face her godfather.

Sirius looks at Hermione, genuine fear on his face.

“Sirius Orion Black, don’t you dare,” Hermione warns.

“Well, you’ll know soon enough,” Sirius laughs, taking a dramatic sip of Ogden’s.

10:50, September 1, 2018, Platform 9 ¾, King’s Cross

A bustling crowd, composed of young witches and wizards, their families, and fantastical creatures, fills the air with an electric sort of energy. Students donning flowing robes of vibrant colours bustle about, their owls perched on their shoulders or nestled safely in cages. Laughter and excited chatter intermingle with the occasional hoot or caw, creating an atmosphere charged with anticipation.

“Why don’t you all ride the train with me?” Iris asks, glancing at all the adults that have joined her on the platform to see her off. The small witch has quite the entourage: Remus, Sirius, Cassie, Caitlyn, and both her parents.

“Because you’ll see us at the feast in a few short hours,” Draco smiles.

“And this is a chance for you to meet friends,” Hermione adds. “I met Uncle Ron, Harry, and Neville on my first train ride.”

“And Dad!” the little girl grins.

“Yes, and Dad,” Hermione laughs.

“Hi, Iris!” a red-headed girl shouts, rushing across the platform toward the group.

“Lily!” Iris grins.

“I have to do my rounds, but I’ll come to find you on the train, ok? You can sit with Freddie, Mia, and James if you want!” the girl smiles, her Head Girl pin gleaming in the sunlight. With that, she takes off once more, weaving through the crowds.

“Mum,” Iris whispers suddenly.

“Yes my love,” Hermione replies.

“Is it a good surprise?”

“The best surprise,” Hermione assures her. “Now off you go, we’ll see you in a few hours.”

“I love you,” Iris smiles feebly.

“Hey Ris,” Draco smiles. “Don’t be nervous.”

“You’re going to be great, Iris,” Cassie nods. “I’ll see you soon.”

The Hogwarts Express speeds off, and the moment it is out of sight, there is a resounding *crack* as the adults apparate off to their respective destinations.

But, just outside the gates of Hogwarts, seven witches and wizards arrive in unison.

“Hello, you lot!” Neville smiles, opening the large iron gate with the flick of his wand.

“She’s going to be shocked,” Hermione whispers to her husband.

“Let’s enjoy it while it lasts. I’m sure by the time she’s fourteen this surprise will be the bane of her existence,” Draco laughs.

As Iris Granger-Malfoy enters the Great Hall in a long line of her fellow first-year students, she feels her breath catch. Because while she had certainly been expecting to see her parents, as well as her uncle Neville, Uncle Moony, and Cassie, three more familiar faces now fill the head table. Hermione watches as her daughter’s face lights up in shock and delight at the sight of the new additions to the staff at the head table.

The sorting passes in a trance, and Iris is certain she can feel her heartbeat in her throat. She watches as her mother places the sorting hat on each student’s head, and smiles to herself as each of her classmates scurry off to their house tables.

“Iris Granger-Malfoy,” Hermione smiles, beckoning her daughter forward.

Iris sits dutifully on the small stool, momentarily smoothing her new robes.

The hat mumbles to itself for a few seconds, debating the fact that the young witch possesses the traits of all four houses in abundance. She is brave, yet cunning. Witty, yet hard working. Ambitious, chivalrous, patient, and intelligent.

But, amongst all of these qualities, the sorting hat can tell that there is one thing that the young girl holds above all else: loyalty, her friends, and family.

So, with a shout, the hat declares:

“HUFFLEPUFF!”

Iris sits contentedly at the Hufflepuff table next to two girls she’d met on the train, both muggleborns and Mia Potter, her best friend since birth.

“I have a few exciting announcements to make,” Remus smiles, his headmaster robes a beautiful shade of evergreen.

“We have four new members of staff joining us this year. First, Caitlyn Jones of Ilvermorny will be joining us as the Care for Magical Creatures class, taking over for Professor Hagrid who is now enjoying his well-earned retirement.”

There is a polite round of applause as Caitlyn smiles down at the students.

“Cassandra Lupin-Black, my lovely daughter will be joining us as Hogwarts’ first-ever mind healer. She is here as a source of support for all of you. I invite you all to stop by her office over the coming weeks and introduce yourselves.”

Various students whisper amongst themselves, some of them familiar with the young witch from her various awards that can be found in the trophy room.

“Next, the lovely Ginny Potter is joining as Hogwarts’ newest professor of flying and quidditch, as well as the official referee of our quidditch games.”

Cheers break out among the students, especially the older ones who are aware of the witch's talent on the pitch. Not two years prior, Ginny had scored the winning goal for England in the Quidditch world cup, bringing the cup home to England for the first time in over fifty years.

"Finally, I'm sure your new Defense Against The Dark Arts professor requires no introduction. But, nonetheless, this is Harry Potter, who will be taking over the role after much pleading on my part. I am sure I do not need to defend his qualifications for the role," Remus chuckles.

The students erupt in excitement, staring in awe at their new DADA professor, the saviour of the wizarding world.

"Now, you've all had a long day, so *pip pip* off to bed. First years, please follow your prefects back to the common room."

Iris happily glances toward her prefect, Dominique Weasley. "Hey Ris," the girl grins. "I always knew you'd be a badger like me and Mia. Follow me! We can stop by the kitchens and say hi to the elves!"

Hermione watches as her daughter happily leaves the hall behind Fleur and Bill's daughter, Mia Potter in tow. She feels tears begin to form in her eyes and turns quickly toward her husband.

"She's so grown up," she whispers.

"So are we," Draco nods. "Our childhood feels so long ago, yet somehow also like it was yesterday."

"The past lives on in the present. Everything we have been, remains inside of us," Hermione smiles. "We are every self we've ever been, all at once."

"I do suppose you're right," Draco nods. "My prattish eleven-year-old self lives on inside of me, only emerging when I am denied dessert."

Hermione giggles under her breath before falling silent. Bathed in a soft, golden glow emanating from the floating candles that hover above, the Great Hall takes on an ethereal ambiance. Stretching high above, the enchanted ceiling mirrors the night sky, twinkling with stars that partake in a particularly breathtaking display for the evening's festivities.

Among the flickering candlelight, the students of Hogwarts eagerly greet their friends, their laughter and excited chatter filling the hall with excitement.

The pair remain silent, simply *existing* in the moment as the lingering echoes of laughter and cheerful banter fade into a gentle murmur.

"It's beautiful isn't it?" Hermione smiles, turning to face her husband.

"What is?"

"The lives we created for ourselves."

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